

Remarks on Iraq
Douglas J. Feith, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy
Tuesday, July 8, 2003

(Before the Center for Strategic and International Studies)

Feith: Thank you John - Good afternoon.

It's an honor to be here to address you. The Center for Strategic and International Studies commands great respect in our government. John Hamre leads the Center ably as you all know and produces work that improves our understanding of an impressive range of national security issues.

John has asked me to offer some thoughts about the creation of a new, free Iraq - and, in particular, the question of how the United States and the Coalition can build trust there. We want the Iraqis to trust our competence and good faith. Also, the United States wants many countries to contribute to the Coalition's work in Iraq. It helps if they trust U.S. leadership.

The foundation of US policy in Iraq is that Iraq belongs to the Iraqis. Coalition forces are there to liberate the country, not conquer it and not exploit it. We intend for the Iraqis to run their own affairs as soon as possible. And we are taking care that Iraq's economic resources are used honestly, efficiently and transparently for the benefit of the Iraqi people.

The United States has the following high-priority objectives in Iraq: Improving security, increasing the quality of life and creating Iraqi self-government.

To help us attain these objectives, and to emphasize that the future of Iraq should be a matter of concern to all countries, not just the United States, we also have an instrumental objective - maximizing international contributions.

I'd like to give you a quick status report on these objectives:

Security is our most important and pressing objective, but its fundamental to recognize that security, economic and political objectives are closely interrelated.

Without security we can't rebuild the Iraqi

infrastructure and protect it from sabotage. Nor can we expect Iraqi political life to revive if Iraqis don't feel secure enough to travel, go to meetings - express their views without intimidation.

Now on the other hand, we can't increase employment and provide basic services - if we cannot increase employment and provide basic services, popular dissatisfaction will aggravate the security problem, and make it harder to create the moderate, democratic political environment in which new political institutions can be created.

In addition, re-invigorating Iraqi political life and creating institutions of Iraqi self-government are keys to improving security and improving the economy. Until Iraqis fully absorb the fact that they are responsible for their own destiny, we can't expect their whole-hearted contributions to improving security and reviving the economy.

The security situation in Iraq is complex - in some areas, we are engaged in what we call stability operations, but in other areas, we're still engaged in small-scale combat operations.

As Secretary Rumsfeld has noted, we have to deal with at least five different groups of trouble-makers: Remnants of the Ba'athist regime, Foreign Islamist terrorists, Islamists influenced by Iran, looters who are taking advantage of an opportunity to steal and, the general criminality that's let loose when the repressive apparatus of a totalitarian regime suddenly disappears. In this case, magnified by the fact that last year, the Saddam Hussein regime suddenly released thousands of criminals from its prisons.

Of these challenges, the most serious now arises from the remnants of the old regime, which have not yet accepted that that regime - and the inordinate privileges that they received from it are gone forever.

Even though this Ba'athist problem is a serious one, it's confined chiefly to the "Sunni heartland," including part of Baghdad and several "corridors" that are radiating out from the city.

In Kirkuk and Mosul in the north, the security situation has been better, and we've succeeded in keeping the lid on the ethnic antagonisms resulting from Saddam's "Arabization" policies.

In the Shi'a south - with the terrible exception of the incident recently in which six British soldiers were killed - the situation has also been relatively quiet.

We're addressing the security situation in several ways - recently we've undertaken combat operations - such as Desert Scorpion - directed against the Ba'athist remnants.

Our recent offer of large rewards for information on Saddam Hussein and his sons emphasized our determination to root out the Ba'athists and deny them any hope of regaining political power.

In addition, we are considering options for trying former regime officials for atrocities. We're reconstituting the Iraqi civilian police force and - after providing training - putting it back on the streets. This process takes time, for - as one can easily imagine - we mean to make sure that police work in the new Iraq is appropriate for a democratic country.

We've also begun the process of creating the New Iraqi Army. Under the leadership of Walt Slocum who worked with John [Hamre] at the Pentagon during the Clinton Administration, Iraq should have a new division of 12,000 ready within a year and a 40,000-person force ready within three years.

We understand the necessity of involving Iraqis as much as possible in addressing the security situation. The reconstituted police force and army are two mechanisms by which Iraqis will become responsible for security. But we're open to other possibilities as well.

In addition, Ambassador Bremer is reconstituting the Iraqi judicial system, to enable it to try cases of looters, saboteurs, and other criminals.

We've made progress with respect to providing basic services, although we continue to encounter setbacks mainly due to sabotage. Of course, one reason the saboteurs have been so effective is that the Iraqi infrastructure was thread-bare before the war began. Saddam's neglect of the basic infrastructure is now taking its toll.

It's important, again to distinguish among the various parts of the country - in particular, between Baghdad and elsewhere. News coverage, understandably, tends to concentrate on Baghdad, where we face the most severe problems in providing basic services such as electricity and water. Elsewhere in the

country, the situation is better - and in some areas, services are more reliable than they were pre-war.

Ambassador Bremer has recently turned his attention to reviving the Iraqi economy. Much ink has been spilt on discussing certain large contracts awarded to U.S. companies for Iraqi reconstruction. But equally important is the fact that these prime contractors are being encouraged to make maximum use of Iraqi subcontractors on their project. In addition, a large public works project is being inaugurated to provide employment.

It bears mentioning that quality of life problems are rooted not in the war - which did remarkably little damage to the Iraq infrastructure - but in the terrible conditions that Saddam created over decades, which have been compounded by post-war sabotage and looting.

As today's newspapers report, we are moving forward on creating an Iraqi Interim Administration that will give Iraqis a meaningful opportunity to participate immediately in Iraq's governance. A Governing Council is to be established soon. Our goal is to give the Governing Council - a representative group of Iraqis - as much authority as possible, and in time turn the various ministries over to their control. This group would also serve as the Iraqi people's representative to the Coalition Provisional Authority and to the world at large.

Yesterday, the Baghdad City Advisory Council held its first meeting. Together with the Baghdad Executive Committee, this represents a major step in turning over the running of Baghdad to Iraq. The development has been reflected throughout the country by the establishment of local councils of Iraqis.

Along with these interim structures, we're moving ahead on plans to convene a constitutional conference to draft a new constitution for Iraq. Iraqis will play a large role in drawing up these plans. While no final decisions have yet been made, it's clear that it will be up to Iraqis to draft and ratify their new constitution.

This month will be a political turning point for Iraq - we will see the beginnings of the process of creating Iraqi self-government after more than three decades of horrendous tyranny. No one should expect this to be easy. So far, the various parts of Iraqi society have remained committed to the idea of a united Iraq in which all ethnic groups will participate.

Contrary to some predictions, we haven't seen any

tendency for ethnic and sectarian groups to try to break away from Iraq and form their own political entities. As long as this commitment to a united Iraq is maintained, I believe that the prospects for a pluralistic Iraq - in which no one group dominates the others - are good.

Tomorrow will mark three months from that amazing day when the statue of Saddam was toppled in the center of Baghdad. It may seem a long time, but in the life of a nation, it isn't. If in three months we are able to set Iraq firmly on the path to self-government, then we shall have achieved a great strategic victory.

The Coalition Provision Authority is, as its name indicates, a coalition effort. Personnel from coalition countries serve as integral members of its staff. The Council for International Cooperation, headed by a Pole, has been set up to help coordinate the contributions from a wide variety of countries.

The UN Secretary General's Special Representative, Mr. de Mello, has been closely involved in the process of creating the Governing Council. Together with the Iraq Development Fund's International Advisory and Monitoring Board, the Special Representative provides transparency into the Coalition's efforts to rebuild Iraq. He will be in a position to report to the UN on our progress, and to dispel any suspicious about our intentions.

Over 45 nations have made offers of military support for security and stability operations. Currently, 18 countries have military capabilities on the ground in Iraq. The capabilities range from combat divisions and brigades to field hospitals. The United Kingdom and Poland have each agreed to lead multinational divisions to meet stability and security requirements. Other countries are considering doing so. And still other countries have indicated their willingness to participate in peacekeeping, in some cases by contributing units from their national police forces, such as Italy's *carabinieri*.

There has been much discussion of a NATO role for Iraq - in Iraq. As I've noted, two NATO members have agreed to lead multinational divisions, many of whose participants will be NATO members. It would be a happy circumstance if NATO were able to take over responsibility for security in Iraq, but we are far from that stage at present.

And our job is to stabilize Iraq to the point that the burden of maintaining stability will be much smaller than it is at present and, at that point, we would have to evaluate whether

Iraqis could not bear most of that burden on their own.

And now I'd like to offer a few comments about post-war planning.

Planning was done regarding a long list of problems that were anticipated, including such things as Iraqi destruction of the oil fields, Iraqi chemical and biological weapons use, large-scale refugee flows across borders, large numbers of internally displaced persons, food shortages, large-scale ethnic bloodletting, Turkish-Kurdish fighting, a collapse of the Iraqi currency and a long list of other horrors.

Fortunately, most of the anticipated problems never materialized. Instead, we are facing some of the problems brought on by our very success in the war in particular, our ability to use speed to pre-empt many of the actions that we were afraid Saddam might take. Now we infer this from such facts as the failure of the regime to finish wiring bridges and oil fields and its failure to detonate those facilities that were wired.

What surprised the regime was the initiation of the war before we had larger forces in place, before we landed the Fourth Infantry Division, for example. Had we decided that large numbers of forces - large enough to police the cities to prevent the immediate post-regime-collapse looting - were the top priority, we could have delayed the start of the military action and lost tactical surprise, but then we might have had the other terrible problems that we anticipated. War, like life in general, always involves trade-offs. It is not right to assume that any current problems in Iraq can be attributed to poor planning.

Now I'd like to change from my talk about operational considerations to a few comments about "unilateralism." This is a matter that widely affects views of U.S. trustworthiness.

Critics of U.S. policy have tagged President Bush a "unilateralist" but the administration did not act in Iraq unilaterally vis-à-vis the Congress and the United States did not act in Iraq unilaterally vis-à-vis the world. U.S. officials made the case that Saddam Hussein's regime was a threat that required action.

I won't rehearse here the now-well-known substance of the case, but it stood chiefly on the regime's long record regarding aggression, weapons of mass destruction, terrorism and tyranny. Of particular importance was Saddam's defiance of the series of the U.N. Security Council resolutions aimed at

compelling and confirming Iraq's elimination of its weapons of mass destruction materials and programs.

Now in time, we'll learn the truth about Saddam's weapons of mass destruction. But given what we knew the Iraqi regime had and did - for example, its use of poison gas against Iranians and Kurds, its program to deceive the U.N. inspectors, its cooperation with terrorist groups, including al-Qaeda, and its failure to account for known WMD items, including the mobile biological weapons labs - the danger of WMD in Saddam's hands appeared grave.

Before the military action in Iraq, President Bush ensured that his administration would not go it alone. He won a vote of support from the Congress, he led the U.N. Security Council in adopting Resolution 1441 and helped persuade more than forty states to provide support and join the Coalition. Three of them provided combat forces on the ground.

There will long be controversy over the ways and the extent to which a U.S. President should seek congressional and international support for a military action he deems necessary to defend U.S. interests. This is not a simple question.

Bold unilateralism is an unsatisfactory answer, for the United States has moral and practical interests in showing "a decent respect to the opinions of mankind," as our Declaration of Independence put it. But it is also unsatisfactory, I believe, to assume that the UN or any other international organization is inherently more legitimate, wiser or more proper or effective a check and balance on the President than are the institutions envisioned in the U.S. Constitution.

This is a controversy on which debate should continue for years, as the Americans and others think through the current terrorist, WMD and other threats and how the civilized nations can protect themselves and protect the state system. The debate deserves better than name-calling. It is worthy of careful thought.

The United States does not and should not act alone in the world. It's wrong and simplistic to assert that we do or that we want to. As our Coalition work in Iraq demonstrates, when we act we do so in recognition of the benefits that come from cooperation with our allies and friends. We have earned the trust of those allies and friends and we shall earn the trust of the Iraqi people by helping them create a secure and free Iraq.

In closing, I would like to pay tribute to the remarkable men and women who are serving our country in Iraq.

General Abizaid, John Abizaid, who just took the reins of CENTCOM over from General Franks yesterday, is a bold and thoughtful officer who inherits a force whose courage and ability was demonstrated during the wars major combat operations. Those virtues are still operational as we confront the challenges of bringing stability and true peace to Iraq.

Ambassador Jerry Bremer is a forceful, capable leader who in only a few weeks have energized the Coalition Provisional Authority and begun the process of enabling Iraqis to take over their own affairs. He leads a talented and brave group of men and women who have been operating under very difficult circumstances.

We owe General Abizaid and Ambassador Bremer, and all their subordinates - military and civilian - an immense debt of gratitude as they do a job of vast complexity and surpassing importance.

Thank you.

(Applause).

Ladies and Gentlemen Secretary Feith will now take questions directly from the audience.

Q: I had a question for Secretary. Do you think that the threats to the U.S. forces in Iraq [come] maybe [from] the Army - the Iraqi Army? After there are 400,000 men - Iraqis - who now see no future or incentives for themselves within that institution. And if so, do you think that putting them into barracks and getting them out of harm's way - perhaps eventually getting them into public works other things - might perhaps relieve some of the threats against U.S. forces?

Feith: It's an interesting question because it shows that we obviously are not doing a good enough job of explaining what we're actually doing in Iraq. The good thoughts that you just offered have been on the minds of our people working on this subject, in particular, Walt Slocombe whom I mentioned his responsibility is for the creation of the New Iraqi Army for many weeks now. And we in fact, are moving to implement the ideas that you raised.

The Iraqi Armed Forces were disestablished but the people are receiving payments, some of them are going to become members of the New Iraqi Army - other are going to be used for other possible police work or other security functions, and other

will be used for other public works functions in the country.

And it's clear that at the top levels of the Iraqi Army there were serious problems of brutality and corruption and many of those people were very bad people. But there were a large number of people in the Iraqi Army who are going to be in a position to serve their country well in the future and we are indeed focused on that issue.

Q: Could you give us more details of what you're considering for trials for atrocities? Would it be in Truth Reconciliation Commissions? Would it be Iraqi courts or U.S. courts or perhaps the military commissions?

Feith: This is a subject that's under consideration right now so I have no conclusions to report to you.

There are a lot of ideas that are being drawn from the experiences of many different countries around the world. You referred to the Truth and Reconciliation process that goes back into South African history and then there are processes that were used in Eastern Europe. All of these historical examples are being mined for thoughts that are relevant to the Iraqi case.

Many of the atrocities are outrageous that were committed by the regime against Iraqis and it may be most suitable to have Iraqis running those processes - the process for bringing justice to the perpetrators. We're considering this right now, we're consulting with the Iraqis about it. There are number of issues of this kind where we are not looking to simply make the decisions we are looking to - as the Iraqi develop this Governing Council and other institutions of an Interim Administration to bring the Iraqis in so that they are key players and key decisions-makers with respect to matters of great national and historical importance such as the prosecution of atrocities.

Q: I'm wondering - we're all a little bewildered. Can you tell what happened on July 4th with the Turkish Liaison Office in Kurdistan who gave the order, what the reasons were for it for it, and what kind of communication that will the Turkish government and military?

Feith: I can't. I'm not up to speed on all of the details there, I've been out of town over the last period and I'm just not fully read in, so I'm sorry I have to pass on that one.

Q: There's been talk about the prime contractors and government officials that the Iraqi's need to work. Can the

Iraqi companies come to Amman or Kuwait to meet with companies that are going to bid on these subcontracts? Other countries meet with the companies that are going to bid on the contracts?

And then a second question is, is this public works programs going to be funded out of the Iraq development funds?

Feith: I don't have the operational details of how contractors move around. But on the question of funding, there are a number of sources of funds that are being tapped for the reconstruction effort. There are the frozen assets of the Iraqi government that were in the United States and elsewhere that were seized and are now available for use for the Iraqi people.

There are the funds in the U.N. Oil for Food Escrow account and a billion dollars of those funds were transferred into this new fund created the development fund for Iraq which is also holding the oil revenues that are beginning to come in as oil sales get underway. And I'm pleased to say that they have gotten underway and that was a project that was planned for, we were happy that there was not the kind of wide spread destruction of the oil fields that we anticipated and that as I said is clear from the fact that the oil fields were wired. Saddam intended but didn't manage to pull off and so the damage that was done has been repaired and oil is now flowing and the revenues are going to help rebuild the country.

There are other sources of funds including some international contributions and there are U.S. appropriated funds and so there are actually multiple sources funding for the effort. I don't know which source would be used for any particular contract but a serious effort is being made to organize essentially a national budget for Iraq and make sure that the expenditures are done in a sensible fashion so that you don't have people operating, different people in the Coalition Provisional Authority operating across purposes or redundantly.

Q: There is controversy right now about whether the United States should increase the number of its troops in Iraq. Even some commanders on the ground are making some comments, and I was wondering what your opinion was on that. And whether you can give us - the Americans here, and the rest of the world - a timeframe on how long you are planning to stay in Iraq. Don't you think it's fair to have that kind of assessment?

Feith: I can't offer a time frame. It depends on too many events that we don't control. As the President had said, "we will stay in Iraq as long as necessary." We are going to ensure that we lay the foundation for an Iraqi government that

can function representatively with building democratic institutions in the country. The Ba'athists are not going to return to power and we are committed to seeing this project through and we will stay as long as it takes.

We are not interested in staying any longer than is required. We have no ambitions to control or dominate Iraq and will be very happy when our work is done and we can depart.

Now - the issue of force levels. The issue of force levels is complex because it involves a number of players. There are the U.S. forces, there are the force from coalition countries that are in the country already. There are coalition force contributions that I referred to in my remarks that we are working on organizing from other countries. The U.K. led multi-national division and the Polish led multi-national division are examples. There are also security functions being performed by Iraqis, we have tens of thousands of police that have now been put back on the job - trained and put back on the job. And as I mentioned we're in the process of training up a new Iraqi Armed force. So you have many types of security forces coming from many places.

Our commanders assess the situation, assess the security force resources available and decide on what they think - whether the forces that we have there now are adequate or whether they want to come and request more. As of now, our commanders say that the forces are adequate. This is a judgment that is revisited continually, but as of right now the force is in place and those in the pipeline are considered adequate to do the job. And our goal is not to be increasing U.S. or international force levels in Iraq, our goal is to put Iraq under the control of Iraqi, including the security responsibilities to the greatest extent possible as soon as possible.

And we are not looking to make Iraq a ward of the international community. Iraq should be a proud sovereign country standing on its own two feet as soon as it can.

Q: You spoke of other countries that you are speaking with in terms of sending additional troops. Many of those countries including some you have hoped will send the largest number of troops have indicated that they prefer not to serve under U.S. Command and it is suggested that perhaps the command structure should be turned over to NATO or some other international structure. Do you see any advantage to that in terms of getting more participation there that would allow the U.S. to lessen its own participation? Or in fact decreasing the number of forces to deal with the security problem that you

outlined? And if you see any possibility that, when might that happen?

Feith: It's a routine part of force generation as it is called, that one engages with potential contributors on a whole range of issue including command arrangements. So we talk about this with all the countries that are interested in coming in to play a role. And this is true in Iraq and it's been true in other areas.

We do not see command arrangements as an insurmountable obstacle in our dealing with several countries that appear to be most serious about playing a role in Iraq. And so I'm pretty confident that we'll be able to make arrangements that are satisfactory to everybody.

Q: Morale is said to be plummeting, as has been reported, and attacks seem to be increasing. And there have been no weapons of mass destruction discovered. The connection with al-Qaeda has fizzled away, and Senator Lieberman saying that everything that you have done has basically been wrong. Do you think that war was at best, precipitous or maybe a big mistake at worst?

Feith: No. (Laughter)

I don't think I agree with a single premise that you just put forward.

Q: You have outlined a process of institution building that has now begun. Key to Iraq's future will be to transfer loyalty that was under fear from the former regime to the new institutions. How do you see that process occurring and over what sort of time period?

Feith: That's more or less the issue that underlay all of my remarks about trust. It's a very important question. But first I'd say I don't think that the old regime commanded a lot of loyalty. There were people who were obedient but I'm not sure any - there was a great deal of loyalty.

But the issue of developing institutions that have authority and legitimacy in the eyes of Iraqis now is our - it is our great political challenge. As I said it's a challenge that's related to the security and economic jobs that we have to do. Basically I would say we start from a venerable premise, which is that governments derived their authority from the consent of the government. And we believe that that's the universal concept and that that applies to Iraqis as well and if we create institutions

that are representative and reflect their consent, and if we do a proper job of laying the ground work for democratic government, which is a lot more than elections by the way.

But if we lay the groundwork and create the right kinds of institutions, which include things like private property rights, and an independent judiciary and a free press. If we succeed in getting those building blocks in place and can't create a government that does in fact reflect the consent of the govern, then that government will have the authority and the legitimacy that it needs to function. And it's a very big challenge, and this is something that Ambassador Jerry Bremer understands, I can say from my personal discussions with him - he understands very well from the historical perspective, from the (inaudible)point of view, right down to the very important ordinary practicalities of trying to create these institutions. But it's a big challenge and it will be as I mentioned a great strategic victory for the United States and for the world and for the Middle East in particular if we can succeed.

Thank you very much.

Applause.

- End -

[transcript prepared by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, with clarifications by CSIS]