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Presenter: Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz

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Wolfowitz interview with the San Francisco Chronicle

(Interview with Robert Collier, San Francisco Chronicle)

Collier: Thank you very much for taking some time out of your busy schedule. Did you come from Monterey?

Wolfowitz: Yeah, Monterey. Spent most of yesterday at 29 Palms watching the Marines exercise... range, some of the things they're doing in the area of what we call Transformation, and you see this interesting challenge that they got to think about how to prepare their people to fight next week or next month and it's a real problem for them to think beyond that and say how're we going to do something radically different ten years from now.

You really basically can't honestly ask the same people to do both, yet as a department we have to do both at the same time, so it's a challenge.

Spent some time at the Naval Postgraduate School, which is a place where they have the freedom to think about outside the box and think about the future. Then we're going up to Ft. Lewis to visit the Army where they are, actually the units (stand) up, as I understand it - I'll know more after Monday, are very much focused on where they want to be 8 years from now.

I might just begin with a comment. We obviously are into the Congress for a very large increase in Defense spending by any such standard you want to use except as a wartime defense budget, which in many ways this is-- it's a rather modest increase. I am not suggesting that is a small amount of money but I think people should keep it in proportion a little bit.

Rumsfeld was out in Utah just last week and observed that we have more troops deployed to protect the Olympics today than we have in Afghanistan. So this, I think though I don't know the exact numbers that we probably have more people on active duty today in the U.S. patrolling the skies and on being on alert in the event that we have an emergency than we have in Afghanistan.

In any case it's a large number, more than 80,000 people have been called to active duty. We have stop-loss orders in most of the services to keep specialists from moving out. And to manage that scale of conflict with still a defense budget that's under 3 1/2 percent of Gross National Product is historically unprecedented. I don't think we can stick with that, but we're trying to get a lot with a big budget, but not by historical standards a huge budget.

Collier: How much of the zero-based reorganization can we really do? Because you have of course the usual political constraints as far as domestic bases and stuff, bases that you want to close because of x,y, and z reasons in Congress.

Wolfowitz: Well, because of laws. No, that's one of the most serious obstacles and I don't want to pick on Congress, but I think we've had this argument openly.

Our estimate is that between 20-25 percent of our base structure is no longer needed. But because of the legislation that is designed to keep the executive branch from Congress' eyes arbitrarily closing bases, or you might say closing bases in individuals' districts. We're not all pretty much to do anything without a base realignment and closure operation.

We tried to get an authority from Congress to do that starting in FY03 and only with the threat of a Presidential veto were we able to get it at all and postpone until 05. And if you just stop think about it that means, for example, where we have enhanced security around virtually all of our bases at the costs of billions of dollars. Some 20 percent of that expenditure could have been avoided if we had gotten base closure done a couple of years ago.

So I don't think you can do zero basing. On the other hand, in zero basing in the sense of 'start with a clean slate' you start with all kinds of locked in restrictions. And all the brilliant private-sector managers who say if only I were running the Defense Department, I know what I'd do. Well, the first thing they'd discover is the Civil Service commission wouldn't allow them to fire the 50,000 non-performers that they would have done in their own business, for example.

But I think that the sense of emergency and the sense that there is so much work to be done can actually be used as an engine for change. Because as Rumsfeld said over and over again this is the time we can least afford to keep doing things that aren't necessary anymore.

Collier: How about say, Europe? Around the world you have constraints that aren't legal but they're diplomatic and they're also in

terms of image. For instance there's Germany... why do we need so many tens of thousands of troops in Germany?

Wolfowitz: Some of them serve a purpose, some as you correctly point out are there for a largely political purpose. I give you a small example, I don't know which category it comes in, but for years we've been trying to reduce the deployment of Air Force fighters to Iceland, which is in the scheme of things perhaps it is a small amount. But it is a burden on Air Force deployments and every time that you maintain a fighter squadron overseas you have to have two or three here, you can't keep the same people deployed year after year so you've got to have the rotation base to sustain them. But when we start talking to Icelanders about pulling them out, they say well you need air defense of the United States now we need air defense of Iceland. So we're still in a fairly deep discussion about that one.

Rumsfeld, 8-10 months ago said, we've got these, I forget the number, and I think it's 3 or 4000 people in the Sinai to help sustain the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty that was signed 20 years ago. Almost everyone agrees that these guys perform no function of a military kind whatsoever, but the political symbolism is judged so important that everyone, including people in our government, especially the State Department say that this is not a good time to be taking them out.

Collier: The peace process and all that. What are we defending them against? The Greenlanders?

Wolfowitz: No, I suppose what they would say is another commercial airliner. You know we want to be protected, they want to be protected, and everyone wants to be protected now. I'm hopeful that we'll be able to convince them that there are other ways to actually put defenses in place if there should be a credible threat that someone's going to hijack an airliner into Iceland. It's not easy to change anywhere in the world.

I don't know what the Koreans precisely said to the President when he was there but I make a guess that they don't want us touching a hair on a head of a single GI stationed in Korea. People like things the way they are.

Collier: Even though to what extent is the real tripwire to the North Koreans? 37,000 Americans or is it the nuclear threat?

Wolfowitz: I don't think it's the nuclear threat. I think our ground commitment in Korea is very important. Whether it has to be exactly the way it was 10 years ago which was itself a scaled down version of what it was 20 years? I think it's a reasonable question to be asking.

Collier: So there could be some real...

Wolfowitz: I think it's everywhere we operate. I certainly don't want to pick on Korea; I don't even want to pick on Iceland. Everywhere we operate there are reasons why people don't want to change, and everywhere we operate we got to ask ourselves whether it is impossible to do some things more efficiently. Because when you have 86,000 people called to active duty you figure out ways to reduce that number.

Collier: 86,000 people, including rotational units. Because there are how many, 37,000 on the ground in South Korea?

Wolfowitz: No... no... I'm saying 86,000 in whole military. In Korea it's about 37,000 U.S. active duty people deployed. The 86,000, that's the number of National Guard and Reservists that have been called to active duty to protect Utah and to do the airborne patrol over the United States, to provide some of the functions in Afghanistan as well.

(Section deleted owing to groundrules.)

Collier: Well actually, so just to make the point clear, this is not a game of gotcha... I'm just trying to understand here, again on background. So if North Korea sends a half-a-million people across the line, there is no, in the terms of broad of United States policy, no first use pledge?

Wolfowitz: I don't want to make policy there. We're talking about an area because of that ambiguity that I'd really have to look at.

Collier: So there is a strategic ambiguity there?

Wolfowitz: Yep.

Collier: Okay, good. I'd like to go to Columbia. There are proposals, apparently on the table, to declare the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC) a strategic target in the war against terrorism. Why is this necessary?

Wolfowitz: Quite honestly, I don't think that is the focus of our thinking about Columbia right now. That is in the sense of necessarily thinking of FARC as connected to the larger terrorism problem. But there is no question that the FARC has behaved abominately, and I think just in the time the negotiations have resumed, I believe Jan. 20, that just in that time they've pulled off 4 car bombings, they've killed some 20 civilians, they've blown up electric pylons, they've blown up pipelines, they've kidnapped one Columbian senator and hijacked an airplane. And, Pastrana has been the sole of restraint I think. I've heard nothing but comments on how restrained he's been over the last 12 months, and including in this period since the Despeje was supposed to have been reconsidered. So, I think our view is that he clearly deserves American support and that Columbian democracy is something that deserves American support. Whether or not FARC is connected to other terrorist networks or extends beyond Columbia. So, I mean there may be some authorities that we have available because of Sept 11 that we would not have had available previously. But I think that the discussions that I've been privy to have all been about how do help the Columbians and how do we help both the process of sustaining democracy in that county and hopefully the process of getting things back to serious peace talks.

Collier: So, it might or might not, come under the roof of the war against terrorism?

Wolfowitz: Right, the it is what we might actually do to help them and that's still to be decided. Of course we're doing a lot for Columbia in the counter-drug area. That I think that help their military considerably. But in the wake of his announcement last week, we're looking at other things we might do to help.

Collier: And those other things include increased intelligence, of course the proposal for the pipeline training that the brigade needs for pipeline defense. And possibly, apparently, extending the roles of that brigade, and the United States trainers to defense of other infrastructure as well?

Wolfowitz: The pipeline defense brigade is something that is already on the table and I really don't want to get into details on what we're thinking about now other than - intelligence sharing is obviously one are of training, there is another area... I do think the emphasis in everything again I've heard is on helping the Columbians defend themselves not on having us step in and take over the job for them.

Collier: But there are proposals for expanding the use of United States military trainers for not just that brigade but others as well?

Wolfowitz: You know there are so many different proposals I don't want to comment on what there is and what there isn't. There is a serious review going on right now of what we can do to help them in a difficult situation.

Collier: And what do you think that is?

Wolfowitz: I don't know, that is what the review is for. I just think it's clear that this guy has very reluctantly taken a very brave step and that I think that it's both in America's interest and there's a certain degree of moral obligation to figure out what we can reasonably do to help. At the same time there are limits on what we can do and there are clearly limits on how deeply we want to get involved in fighting other people's fights.

Collier: What's the Pentagon's analysis of the military capacity of the FARC? Is it a real danger to the Columbian government in the medium term?

Wolfowitz: I think when you can kidnap senators and threaten people and blow people up, it's incredibly dangerous. We've never had to live with that sort of situation in this country, sort of hard for us to imagine it. I've seen in other countries, on a much milder scale, where people begin to be afraid to speak up to say reasonable things because reasonable people get killed when they do that. In Columbia you've got judges who get killed if they put people in jail. I don't think you evaluate the capability of the FARC on purely military terms. It is a terrorist organization and the question is whether this terrorist organization will succeed in subverting an essentially democratic government.

Collier: They apparently have a revenue stream of a couple of hundred million dollars a year. I've followed Columbia for a number of years. But where does all that money go? The FARC is, you know, maybe 16-18,000 people under arms, they've got the usual gorilla force, their logistics are expensive, at least they sort of have to pay their way through, they have to bribe everybody and his dog. But really a couple of hundred million dollars is a whole chunk of change that you just don't see. Are there unseen military capacities?

Wolfowitz: I don't know the answer in detail, I really don't. I have a suspicion that with other terrorist organizations as well, including Al Qaeda, that they use a lot more money than we're aware of. I remember right after Sept 11 there was some quite absurdly low estimates of how much money Al Qaeda needed that sort of seem to be based on doing the expense accounts of 15 hijackers for 12 months. That isn't where the big money goes.

Later people said 'well it turns out that they may have giving the Taliban as much as \$100 million a year just their access to that country.' You alluded that in the case of the FARC that the whole system of bribing people to do things their not supposed to do, and creating false documents and moving freely around places can get very expensive. I haven't seen an attempt to account for the FARC's money, but I would caution that we probably don't have a very good track of where it all goes.

Collier: Do they believe that they have surface-to-air missiles?

Wolfowitz: I don't know that.

Collier: Are the plans, thinking of the review, focusing on the FARC? Or whole one as well?

Wolfowitz: I think it's the whole Columbian problem.

Collier: Which would presumably include the current militaries?

Wolfowitz: I guess that they're certainly part of the problem. They're not the most immediate cause of the trouble. One of the ways the FARC can destabilize Columbia is by creating conditions in which the only way to effectively oppose them is by teaming up with the paramilitaries, that's the sort of first step towards basically destroying a country.

Collier: Now that is sort of the current situation that the only way we can oppose the FARC is through (inaudible)?

Wolfowitz: With the paramilitaries? I would hope not. It seems to me that what we want to do is to strengthen the legitimate government in Columbia to oppose both of them.

Collier: On Iraq... regime change. There is some fair amount of debate whether the Iraqi National Congress is a real viable operation or whether it's a farce. What's your take?

Wolfowitz: There is so much excitement over Iraq, and the President has said some things very, very clearly and I don't want to

start embellishing on what he said. What he has said and what I think people need to think a little harder about is that in effect we've got regimes that are open in their hostility towards the United States, that support terrorism and then pursue weapons of mass destruction. That combination of hostile terrorism and weapons of mass destruction is something that is so deadly that you can't afford to wait until you catch them doing it to deal with the problem. I think one way of putting it is that Sept 11 has now given us a very visceral and un-theoretical understanding of what commercial airliners can do and what suicide bombers are capable of. If you've said it back in August you would have been perhaps accused of fantasizing, and now we know what can actually happen. And you can't wait until we have a clear visceral, un-theoretical understanding of what a massive anthrax attack or a radiological or nuclear attack would do to an American city before you work to prevent that from happening.

So the countries that pose that connection are a problem. But there's a lot of I think jumping to conclusions that because the President has identified that as a problem that he's also come to a conclusion about what the solution is. Sort of by implication that it is military force, and I don't think he's made any decisions on what to do or suggest that the solution in all three cases is the same.

Collier: But in terms of military analysis, again I'm not asking you to make a diplomatic judgments, but simply in military terms, how feasible are the various options that are a part of public record that have been discussed? The Iraqi National Congress, is it militarily...is the sort of Afghan option open?

Wolfowitz: If I were an academic I might be free to discuss theoretical not military options. But as a fundamental matter we don't start speculating on what military options are available. The fact is though, a lot depends on things that are not military but much more political and the level of political support or opposition that might develop in Iraq in different circumstances and that's somewhat un-knowable.

Collier: What's the relevance of Iraq to 9/11?

Wolfowitz: Go back to what the President said. If you think about what weapons of mass destruction would mean for a future 9/11, not for what happened in September but what could happen next September or in July or whenever, that the lesson of 9/11 is that we probably should have been more active before 9/11 in preventing 9/11. Although if we had gone, if we had attacked, started attacking the Taliban last July people would have said where's the evidence. Is all this just because they blew up our embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam.

I think what we've sort of come to over the last 20 years was, maybe longer, but certainly over the last 20 years was the sort of notion was that terrorism is a necessary evil. It's an evil, but one of those things that you have to live with. You think, in some sense, it was tolerable. I think that what 9/11 has demonstrated is that it is fundamentally intolerable and that is particularly intolerable when it is linked to the possibility of using weapons of mass destruction. So you can't wait until you have evidence beyond a reasonable doubt that somebody did something in the past, you know that people are planning to do something against you in the future and that they're developing incredibly destructive weapons to do it with and that's not tolerable.

Collier: Is there any, have you seen any convincing evidence to link Iraq to Al Qaeda or its international network?

Wolfowitz: A lot of this stuff is classified and I really can't get into discussing it. But you know the use of the word evidence there are, I think people shouldn't be under the impression that we have this perfect picture of what's out there and we've got 90-95% situational awareness of what Al Qaeda is. If we had, they would have never been able to obviously pull off Sept. 11, and for all that we have been after them since then, and learned a great deal since then. The amount that we don't know is still, I think, much larger than the amount that we do know. The one strength, the only strength, certainly one of the principal strengths of organizations of that kind is the ability to hide and to conceal. That's how they protect against their otherwise enormous weakness. Any time they're found out they can be exposed. So, I think it's a basic principle that has to be understood in addressing this problem. It's one of the reasons why early on Sec. Rumsfeld talked about the idea of draining the swamp as opposed to finding out about each individual snake in the swamp and killing it. He wanted, obviously, to the extent you know of things, know of people planning things you go after them. But you also can't be tolerant any longer of people openly providing support for that kind of activity even its not specific, even if you don't know of a specific plan.

Collier: But I'm not asking you to disclose classified information of course, but are you convinced that there are operational links between the Iraqi government and Al Qaeda?

Wolfowitz: I never said there are.

Collier: And so if the to what extent...

Wolfowitz: We also know that there are things that haven't been explained... like the meeting of Mohammad Atta with Iraqi officials in Prague. It just comes back to the fact that...

Collier: Which now is alleged right? There is some doubt to that?

Wolfowitz: Now this gets you into classified areas again. I think the point which I do think is fundamental, is that, the premise of your question seems to be, we wait for proof beyond a reasonable doubt. I think the premise of a policy has to be we can't afford to wait for proof beyond a reasonable doubt. That is a way in which any number of terrorist regimes have, over the last 20 years, gotten away with doing things that I think encourage more behavior of that kind.

Collier: Well, al Qaeda, the war against al Qaeda of course is large and expanding and complicated. Al Qaeda and its allied international organizations is a huge operation and any major, the concern is, any major offensive against or action dealing with Iraq would both distract US resources in the fight against Al Qaeda and extremely diplomatically complicate the war against al Qaeda.

Wolfowitz: Look, you're assuming that the President has decided a whole bunch of things that he hasn't decided to do and whether or not he can get the whole world to stand by him. What I'm quite sure of is whatever he decides to do, probably the major objective will remain, how does this support or hurt against this primary terrorist network. I don't know if primary is right word, the one that is our primary target, but not our only target. But, sometimes focus may be the right thing; sometimes a broader campaign may be the right thing. I remember an early stage in the campaign in Afghanistan where people were suggesting that the crucial thing was to separate the al Qaeda from the Taliban and not to attack the Taliban but to only attack al Qaeda. I think in retrospect that was totally impracticable advice and to the contrary what turned out when the Taliban fell was all kinds of governments that had bad records in this area suddenly started getting very cooperative with us. So, I think anything we do has got to be evaluated against standards of this broad campaign and I think it will be evaluated in that way. I would just sort of caution people to not assume before the President decided what to do that he has decided what to do. I think it is perfectly appropriate to ask the question if we do something with any of those three countries that he mentions how will that affect our ability to get cooperation against other targets, and in particular against al Qaeda. It's, I'm sure, going to be one of the principal considerations.

Let me give you another example. I've heard it said that it was terribly beastly of him to say unkind things about the Iranians and that all this has done is drive the moderates into the hands of the hardliners. But one of the first things that came after the state of the union message was that the Iranians were detaining, I think that they're claim was 140 al Qaeda people who had passed through Iran. Now I don't know whether they are actually detaining any of those folks, but it certainly seems to me that their reaction to the President's message was to start to do the right thing.

You make a move in this campaign and you get certain reactions from it and from those reactions you can decide on what your next steps will be. But what the President has said from the beginning and I think its absolutely right is that you can't focus, it certainly would have been a mistake to just focus on Iran, it would be a mistake to just focus on one particular terrorist network. There is an opportunity now to really move to a policy that doesn't continue tolerate terrorism as a necessary evil. And I think in that respect that 9/11 really was a wake up call and that if we take proper advantage of this opportunity to prevent the future terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction that it will have been an extremely valuable wake up call. But if we say our only problem was to respond to 9/11, and we wait until somebody hits us with nuclear weapons before we take that kind of threat seriously, we will have made a very big mistake.

Collier: Sticking on Iran for a second, have you seen any links between the Iranian government, or any factions of the Iranian government and al Qaeda?

Wolfowitz: I think as the President has said, we've seen disturbing evidence of al Qaeda people fleeing Afghanistan into Iran and through Iran. One can never be sure in that country what the government controls and what they don't control. That in it self is disturbing. There's no question that the Iranians have been behind some of the worst terrorist attacks on Americans and on other people over the last 10 years. And that I think is a problem that has to be addressed.

Collier: When you say attacks in the past 10 years which are you referring to?

Wolfowitz: Well I could even go back further but...

Collier: Well there's the Hezbollah in Beirut...

Wolfowitz: Well there's certainly there are strong indications that they were implicated in Khobar Towers for example. And that very actively, pretty openly supportive of terrorist activity.

Collier: Israel even...

Wolfowitz: All around the world.

Collier: Is there any link you've seen between the Iranians and Whabiism in the Gulf?

Collier: Because the general perception is that they're sworn enemies.

Wolfowitz: I think that without addressing that specific connection, you see a lot connections between terrorist groups that are supposed to be sworn enemies or that are supposed to have different ideologies. I think that it is like one Mafia family cooperating with another Mafia family under the right circumstances. These guys live in an underworld where I think there is a good deal of passing of false identities, technical information, cooperation of various kinds and cooperation between people who ostensibly have very different motivations. So, you get into classified terrain here very, very quickly but I think that it is a mistake to say that because there is clearly a difference between Sunni and Shi'a that therefore Sunni and Shi'a can't cooperate on a terrorist activity.

I mean we have the evidence most recently in Gaza where Sunni Palestinians were working with Shi'a Iranians to plan terrorist operations.

Collier: There's concern in the Pentagon that any expanded United Nations peacekeeper force might impact ongoing United States operations against al Qaeda and the Taliban. Can you explain what the concerns are?

Wolfowitz: I don't think that is the concern. There has been frankly some misreporting about supposedly that people are dug into doctrinary positions about what, whether there should or should not be an expanded United Nations presence. What I think there's complete agreement on is that the United States as a country wants to help ensure that Afghanistan doesn't once again become the sanctuary for terrorists or that security conditions in the country don't degenerate in such a way that the Taliban find a way to come back or the al Qaeda find a haven again.

So the question isn't about goals, and the question isn't about, I don't think there is anyone who says we want to get out of Afghanistan as soon as possible, never mind what happens afterwards. The question is what is the best means to get there and I think probably at the end of the day it's some mixture of different things. But in that mixture you've got to get the right balance between what responsibilities can the international community usefully take on and what responsibilities do you want to push into the hands of Afghans. And there are huge advantages to having Afghans responsible for their own affairs, not least of which if they disagree about something and someone gets killed, that they're killed by Afghans and not by foreigners.

I don't want to suggest too many parallels, but in a way Somalia is an object lesson in what happens when international peacekeepers start mixing up in something that perhaps wasn't necessary to get mixed up in. So I think is the primary thing.

I think the other thing that people need to think more about is not just about what the question the military force is, it's sort of amusing at times that people whose main business is diplomacy spend more time saying what the military options should be for providing security.

The real challenge in Afghanistan is going to be getting the political relationships right. What should the authority of the central government be vis-à-vis the provinces, or to put it pejoratively vis-à-vis the warlords. To be honest there's a lot I think we still are learning, there's a lot that's obviously still changing, but we have a fantastic individual - we're lucky to have him who happens to be an Afghan-American who is the President's special emissary to Afghanistan. And every time he goes on another trip out there and talks to more people I would say our understanding of the complexities of the relationships is just enormously enriched.

Clearly I think Karzai has the right ideas of what a future Afghanistan ought look like. But we're talking about a brand new governmental authority whose relationship to all these various warring parts of the country is still something that has to be worked out.

At the same time that you discuss what are the options for providing force you've got to think through much more clearly than we're able to do yet. Who is it that is going to command that force, and for what purposes, and what are going to be limits on what its role is and what things is it going to be authorized to do and what things is it not authorized to do?

Collier: In the near term what are your people's analysis of how long it would really take to get any sort of feasible national force up and running when you've got a general who I think is still there. Now looking into that question, what are the initial indications?

Wolfowitz: That's gonna... we still don't have his assessment back. But it's clear that how fast you can do things is going to depend on how ambitious the thing is your trying to do. We've already been able to mobilize Afghan militias to go hunting al Qaeda in places...

Collier: Or allegedly hunting al Qaeda?

Wolfowitz: No, sorry al Qaeda. There have been sometimes when maybe we've made mistakes. More often we've been accused of not hunting them aggressively enough. There is no question that the people in Tora Bora were al Qaeda and that the people who were helping us go after them were 90% Afghan. I mean they were mobilized by various kind of inducements, including I'm sure money. But there are a lot of ways to put together Afghan forces to accomplish objectives once you decide what those objectives are.

The function of the international security force in Kabul is somewhat unique to Kabul. Which is to say that this is the capital of the country, it's not historically particularly a domain of a particular ethnic group unlike virtually every other major cities are. The purpose of the International Security Assistance Force was first and foremost to ensure the neutrality of Kabul so that you don't get a repetition of the situation that helped bring the Taliban in where a country that is predominately Pashtun has a capital controlled by a government that's primarily Tajik.

Collier: So there is no real concern though in the Pentagon, or your concern, you're not concerned that an expanded peacekeeper force throughout the nation would get in the way of on going operations?

Wolfowitz: I've never heard that concern mentioned at all. The concern is that you may have overreach that you may have an international security force... there is no reason, you don't need a security force in Herat to secure the neutrality of Herat. So the question is what is it there to accomplish, how big does it need to be to accomplish those objectives. The discussion about expanding the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has been entirely in the context of what is most likely to produce a stable Afghanistan in the long run?

Collier: You've mentioned Herat even though the Afghan government has mentioned Herat as one of the places they've suggested there be peacekeepers?

Wolfowitz: And maybe there's a role for them. I'm just saying that it's different from Kabul and you need to think through what that role is before you just assume that just because peacekeepers make sense in Kabul therefore extending them to the other provinces is going to make sense.

Collier: So you're a bit skeptical?

Wolfowitz: I don't think we've worked it out. I think it is very important... go back to what I've said in the beginning. It is very important not to leave Afghanistan in a situation where we reproduce the very craziness that brought us there is the first place. I think the Afghans deserve better frankly. But this is a country that you know has for pretty much 25 years has been ravaged by civil wars and foreign invaders and you're not going to set it right over night and just because there's a problem that there's an immediate solution on the horizon. I think we're going to be at it for a while, I think we're going to have to experiment some.

Collier: On Pakistan and Afghanistan, are you convinced that al Qaeda is no longer getting any significant support from within the

Inter Service Intelligence Directorate (ISID)?

Wolfowitz: I don't know, this one is sort of evidence of the unknown. We know that ISID was, in the past a very bad actor. We know that Musharaff has taken some very bold steps to clean up the ISID. It would be astonishing if he, in the relatively short period of time he's had to work he's been able to clean up the whole organization. But I don't think we know one way or the other what they're actually doing.

Collier: I would assume that the United States would put a huge amount of attention into that very issue. The United States alone has had liaison like relationships with the ISID and now the United States has some significant relationships with the Pakistani Army. Do you think that the ISID presence has had some significant role in helping Bin Laden escape?

Wolfowitz: I don't know where Bin Laden is, so I can't say that he's escaped, I certainly can't say I know who's had a role in his escape. I come back to the basic point that there have been some very bad actors in Pakistan in the past. We have a president of Pakistan that has stepped up very boldly to try and deal with the problem. There's a lot that inevitably we're not going to know about the inner workings of that organization. I think that what we can know is that the more we can help Musharaff, the more we can help him demonstrate to his people that casting their lot with the United States was a smart thing to do, the more effective he's going to be in keeping those folks out.

Collier: What is, there's been a lot of talk of course about blow-back in Pakistan and Afghanistan and the possible case of blow-back. With the ISID another case of sort of Frankenstein getting away from the doctor, the monster getting away from the doctor. The US again had a very long relationship with the ISID, very extremely extensive. It died down somewhat in the 90s. My question was to what extent that has implications for other places like Columbia. Where there are extensive relationships. Is Columbia paramilitary another monster?

Wolfowitz: The premise that everything in Afghanistan is blow-back, I guess I would question. There clearly are people who got their start when we were cooperating with them against the Soviets, but you could just as well (inaudible) that the reason that they got out of control is because we then disengaged from the place. Both disengaged in the sense of saying that we don't care what happens to Afghanistan now that the Soviets are gone, but also disengaged from Pakistan in the sense of saying that as long as you people are going to pursue nuclear weapons we won't have anything to do with you. I think that it was a mistake to do that. I don't feel that I know enough to argue the case in historical detail. I think it was the right thing to support the opposition to the Soviets in Afghanistan and that when you do that kind of thing it's a messy world, it's not going to be perfect. But that the answer is not to let the Soviets run amuck in Afghanistan and retreat completely. The answer is that once you've achieved that success is to stay engaged and try and shape the right forces and do what you can to weaken the bad ones. I assume that Columbia is a somewhat similar messy situation, but I think the answer isn't to step back and let Columbia be taken over by some combination of narco-terrorists and right-wing militias. Because that certainly is going to bring trouble to us, I believe.

Collier: There has been a considerable amount of criticism of course of how the United States managed aid to the Afghans, mostly subcontracted through the ISI. Hence we gave the ISI immense leeway in choosing factions of the Muj to give it to and they financed one warlord over another?

Wolfowitz: It seems to me that the premise of the whole blow-back notion is that it is better to not be responsible for anything than to step in and try and deal with the problem. When you step in and try to deal with it if it's a messy problem, you're going to take on some responsibility and you're probably going to be responsible for some things that you'd rather not be responsible for. But the alternative is to say since I don't want to be responsible for anything I won't try to influence anything. I think then you step aside and the world becomes a very much nastier place. It seems to me if the specific issue is did we maybe put too much reliance on the ISID maybe we should have learned some things from that, that's entirely possible. I wasn't involved in it then, I don't know the history in detail and I think one has to be careful about who you pick as your allies.

I think ultimately that in this war on terror that as much as possible that we support the kind of people who will help the kind of world we want to see in the long run.

At the end of the State of the Union message the President talked about helping people, wish I could remember the exact quote because I think it's a very nice one, including in the Islamic world who are standing up for the values of freedom and democracy and that supporting them is going to be critical.

Collier: How much continuing relationship did the United States have with the ISI and the Pakistani Army in the 90s?

Wolfowitz: I believe it was virtually terminated by a variety of both executive and congressional imposed sanctions. I can't say in detail but I do know in detail that we sort of lost our ability to influence a generation of Pakistani officers by saying that we're not going to have anything to do with a military that's involved in building nuclear weapons. I don't want to paint it black and white the other way and say if we had done that everything would have been perfect.

I think it was a very close call that we had a guy like Musharaff there that was prepared in those circumstances to say that he would throw his lot in with the US. That the isolation of Pakistan over the course of the 90s could have easily produced a leader who said I don't trust the Americans and I don't want to have anything to do with you Americans and I'll live with the consequences.

Collier: Musharaff in his Sept 20 speech alluded to an American threat that essentially if Pakistan had gone the other direction, rather than ally against al Qaeda there could have been a preemptive first strike against Pakistan's nuclear facilities.

Wolfowitz: Look, if Pakistan had not supported us I'm sure we would have advised them we could make them sorry for doing that. The fact is that I think that if the leader of Pakistan hadn't been, for example, had spent a lot of Turkey had come to be an admirer of Attaturk and Attaturk's attempts to westernize, I don't think he might have made the choice he made.

So engaging with people of that kind trying to have a positive influence on people who are inclined to think our way is at least as important as our ability to threaten.

Collier: Was there that threat?

Wolfowitz: I certainly don't think that there was that threat explicitly. I imagine that Musharaff is trying to explain to his people that the consequence of going down the other road would have been pretty serious.

Collier: Finally, the question of Frankenstein's monster... back to Columbia, the relationships between the ISI and paramilitaries in Columbia. The paramilitaries are growing very rapidly, almost exponentially. There are documented wide relationships between the mid-levels of the Colombian army and the paramilitaries. Are we not in our growing military relationship and intelligence relationship and all every other relationship with the Colombian army looking the other way while another Frankenstein's monster is being created?

Wolfowitz: I don't think so. I think the Colombian Army is that middle road alternative to the country that is the plaything of both the left and the right. If you can't establish some kind of decent, relatively law abiding security force then you turn the country over to the bad guys whichever political complexion they are.

Thanks.

Thank you