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From the Ambassador
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IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN: CONVERSATION WITH WOLFOWITZ

1. Paul Wolfowitz, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, came to Sunday lunch on 17 March.
2. On Iraq I opened by sticking very closely to the script that you used with Condi Rice last week. We backed regime change, but the plan had to be clever and failure was not an option. It would be a tough sell for us domestically, and probably tougher elsewhere in Europe. The US could go it alone if it wanted to. But if it wanted to act with partners, there had to be a strategy for building support for military action against Saddam. I then went through the need to wrongfoot Saddam on the inspectors and the UN SCRs and the critical importance of the MEPP as an integral part of the anti-Saddam strategy. If all this could be accomplished skilfully, we were fairly confident that a number of countries would come on board.
3. I said that the UK was giving serious thought to publishing a paper that would make the case against Saddam. If the UK were to join with the US in any operation against Saddam, we would have to be able to take a critical mass of parliamentary and public opinion with us. It was extraordinary how people had forgotten how bad he was.
4. Wolfowitz said that he fully agreed. He took a slightly different position from others in the Administration, who were focussed on Saddam's capacity to develop weapons of mass destruction. The WMD danger was of course crucial to the public case against Saddam, particularly the potential linkage to terrorism. But Wolfowitz thought it indispensable to spell out in detail Saddam's barbarism. This was well documented from what he had done during the occupation of Kuwait, the incursion into Kurdish territory, the assault on the Marsh Arabs, and to his own people. A lot of work had been done on

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this towards the end of the first Bush administration. Wolfowitz thought that this would go a long way to destroying any notion of moral equivalence between Iraq and Israel. I said that I had been forcefully struck, when addressing university audiences in the US, how ready students were to gloss over Saddam's crimes and to blame the US and the UK for the suffering of the Iraqi people.

5. Wolfowitz said that it was absurd to deny the link between terrorism and Saddam. There might be doubt about the alleged meeting in Prague between Mohammed Atta, the lead hijacker on 9/11, and Iraqi intelligence (did we, he asked, know anything more about this meeting?). But there were other substantiated cases of Saddam giving comfort to terrorists, including someone involved in the first attack on the World Trade Center (the latest New Yorker apparently has a story about links between Saddam and Al Qaeda operating in Kurdistan).

6. I asked for Wolfowitz's take on the struggle inside the Administration between the pro- and anti- INC lobbies (well documented in Sy Hersh's recent New Yorker piece, which I gave you). He said that he found himself between the two sides (but as the conversation developed, it became clear that Wolfowitz was far more pro-INC than not). He said that he was strongly opposed to what some were advocating: a coalition including all outside factions except the INC (INA, KDP, PUK, SCIRI). This would not work. Hostility towards the INC was in reality hostility towards Chalabi. It was true that Chalabi was not the easiest person to work with. But he had a good record in bringing high-grade defectors out of Iraq. The CIA stubbornly refused to recognise this. They unreasonably denigrated the INC because of their fixation with Chalabi. When I mentioned that the INC was penetrated by Iraqi intelligence, Wolfowitz commented that this was probably the case with all the opposition groups: it was something we would have to live with. As to the Kurds, it was true that they were living well (another point to be made in any public dossier on Saddam) and that they feared provoking an incursion by Baghdad. But there were good people among the Kurds, including in particular Salih (?) of the PUK. Wolfowitz brushed over my reference to the absence of Sunni in the INC: there was a big difference between Iraqi and Iranian Shia. The former just wanted to be rid of Saddam.

7. Wolfowitz was pretty dismissive of the desirability of a military coup and of the defector generals in the wings. The latter had blood on their hands. The important thing was to try to have Saddam replaced by something like a functioning democracy. Though imperfect, the Kurdish model was not bad. How to achieve this, I asked? Only through a coalition of all the parties was the answer (we did not get into military planning).

8. On Afghanistan, I told Wolfowitz that we hoped to announce on 18 or 19 March the despatch of 45 Commando Group. To my astonishment he knew nothing of this. When I gave him details, he commented that this was a very significant commitment. I stressed the importance of our getting the Pakistanis to acquiesce in our using Karachi port and airfield to deploy the Group, if it were to be fully operational by mid-April, as

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planned I said that proportionately the British armed forces would be more heavily committed to the Afghan theatre than the American.

9. Wolfowitz was full of praise for General McColl. He had seen for himself on a visit to Bagram last Monday how well ISAF under our command was working with the Americans. He spoke warmly of Franks, less so of Hagenbeck, who tended to shoot off his mouth. There was apparently no evidence from the Predator camera, contrary to what Hagenbeck had said, that the soldier, who had fallen from the Chinook during Operation Anaconda, had subsequently been executed by Al Qaeda.
10. Wolfowitz said that Rumsfeld had signed off on 16 March on the proposal to train six battalions of Afghan soldiers. I referred to our own training of the National Guard, adding that the proliferating number of training schemes by the US, UK and others needed some semblance of coordination. Again it seemed to come as news to him that others were doing training.
11. Wolfowitz did not demur when I said that the greatest danger in Afghanistan was a slipping back to the conditions which had allowed Al Qaeda to prosper in the first place; that the greatest safeguard against this was a continuing visible presence of the US military on land and in the air; and that this implied such a presence for a considerable time to come. Wolfowitz displayed the DOD's customary distaste for an ISAF-type expansion to other Afghan cities. He thought there could be a case for something akin to OSCE monitors in certain regions.
12. Comment. Three things struck me about this conversation: that Wolfowitz knew nothing about 45 Commando Group, further evidence of communications breakdown in the Pentagon; his animus towards the CIA (nothing unusual on the Republican Right); and his continuing concern to make a link between Saddam and 9/11.
13. I am copying this letter to Peter Watkins, Kevin Tebbitt and Admiral Sir Mike Boyce (MOD), Sir Richard Wilson, John Scarlett and Tom McKane (Cabinet Office), Sir Michael Jay (FCO), 'C', Francis Richards (GCHQ), Sir Jeremy Greenstock (UKMis New York) and Jonathan Powell.

*Yours ever
Christopher*

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