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Dr. Condoleezza Rice Discusses Iraq in Chicago

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Remarks by Condoleezza Rice Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs to the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations
Chicago, Illinois

Thank you for having me here today. It is an honor to speak at the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations -- an institution with a proud history spanning eight decades. I am a strong supporter of institutions like CCFR, that bring together citizens from all backgrounds to discuss and debate issues that affect the security of our nation.

And I'm pleased to be in Chicago at this moment of great hope in the City of Big Shoulders. For the first time since 1908, the Chicago Cubs have won a post-season series. As you say in Chicago, any team can have a bad century. But it looks as though the 21st Century might be a little brighter for the Cubs than the 20th.

It has been more than two years since the September 11th attacks -- and it is worth taking a moment to reflect and report on the strategy that America has pursued in responding to that awful day.

No less than December 7th, 1941, September 11th, 2001 forever changed the lives of every American and the strategic perspective of the United States. That day produced an acute sense of our vulnerability to attacks hatched in distant lands, that come without warning, bringing tragedy to our shores. And it compelled us to take a fresh look at an old threat.

For twelve years, Saddam Hussein sat in the heart of the world's most volatile region, defying more than a dozen UN Security Council resolutions, terrorizing his people, threatening his neighbors, and the world.

Saddam Hussein twice launched unprovoked invasions of his neighbors. After losing a war of aggression that he began, Saddam's threatening posture toward other Gulf nations -- and his continued oppression of his people -- required the United States and the United Kingdom to maintain a massive military presence in the Gulf, and patrol two vast no-fly zones for a dozen years. Saddam is the only tyrant of our time not only to possess weapons of mass destruction ... but to use them in acts of mass murder. And he maintained ties to terror, harboring known terrorists within his borders, and subsidizing Palestinian suicide bombers.

September 11th made clear our enemies' goals, and provided painful experience of how far they are

willing to go to achieve them. From their own boasts, we know that they would not hesitate to use the world's most terrible weapons to bring devastation to our shores. In fact, they would welcome it. This threat is potentially so catastrophic -- and can arrive with so little warning, by means that are untraceable -- that it cannot be contained.

We have no evidence that Saddam Hussein was involved in the September 11th attacks. Yet the possibility remained that he might use his weapons of mass destruction or that terrorists might acquire such weapons from his regime, to mount a future attack far beyond the scale of 9/11. This terrible prospect could not be ignored or wished away.

President Bush put it this way: "Some have said we must not act until the threat is imminent. Since when have terrorists and tyrants announced their intentions, politely putting us on notice before they strike? If this threat is permitted to fully and suddenly emerge, all actions, all words, and all recriminations would come too late. Trusting in the sanity and restraint of Saddam Hussein is not a strategy, and it is not an option."

When the President went to the United Nations in September, 2002, there was little controversy about the nature of the threat posed by Saddam Hussein. The intelligence agencies of most governments agreed on Saddam's capabilities and appetites. The United Nations and other international organizations had -- again and again -- documented Saddam's aggressions against his neighbors, tortures of the Iraqi people, and violations of international law. The UN Security Council passed resolution after resolution -- 17 in all -- laying out Saddam's obligations to the world, and demanding that he comply or face the consequences.

The Security Council was right to do so. And President Bush was right to lead a coalition of nations to enforce the Security Council's clear resolutions, to uphold the credibility of the United Nations, and to defend the peace of the world.

Remember the clear logic of Resolution 1441 -- which passed unanimously. 1441 posed a test -- a final test -- of Saddam Hussein's willingness to disarm and comply with his obligations. Saddam Hussein refused to meet that test. 1441 mandated serious consequences if Iraq refused to comply. A coalition of nations ensured that these would not be empty words.

Increasingly, the killing fields are yielding up their dead. The mass graves are being discovered. The Iraq Survey Group is finding -- and recording -- proof that Iraq never disarmed, and never complied with UN inspectors.

We now have hard evidence of facts that no one should ever have doubted. Right up until the end, Saddam Hussein continued to torture and oppress the Iraqi people. Right up until the end, Saddam Hussein lied to the Security Council. And -- let there be no mistake -- right up until the end, Saddam Hussein continued to harbor ambitions to threaten the world with weapons of mass destruction, and to hide his illegal weapons programs.

Let me read you a passage from the progress report that David Kay -- head of the Iraq Survey Group -- submitted to Congress last week:

"We have discovered dozens of WMD-related program activities and significant amounts of equipment that Iraq concealed from the United Nations during the inspections that began in late 2002. The discovery of these deliberate concealment efforts have come about both through the admissions of Iraqi scientists and officials concerning information they deliberately withheld and through physical evidence of equipment and activities that ISG has discovered that should have been declared to the UN."

The ISG has confirmed many activities that we already knew about, including Iraq's massive deception campaign to conceal its weapons programs, and its maintenance of prohibited delivery systems. The ISG has also uncovered some information that appears to corroborate reports that Iraq tested chemical and biological substances on human beings.

And the ISG continues to find evidence of activities that the United States did not know about before the war. For example, the ISG has so far found -- and I quote

"New research on BW-applicable agents, Brucella and Congo Crimean Hemorrhagic Fever."

"Clandestine attempts between late-1999 and 2002 to obtain from North Korea technology related to 1,300 km range ballistic missiles."

"Research on a possible VX stabilizer, research and development for chemical weapons capable munitions, and procurement, concealment of dual use materials and equipment."

These are only the highlights of a statement that runs more than six thousand words. Iraq was required to declare all of these activities to the UN -- but instead deliberately concealed them and deceived the inspectors. Had any one of these examples been discovered last winter, the Security Council would have had no choice but to take exactly the same course that President Bush followed: to declare Saddam Hussein in defiance of Resolution 1441, and enforce its serious consequences.

It is worth reflecting on the alternative to action. Had 1441 -- and the sixteen other resolutions -- not been enforced, the credibility of the United Nations would have been in tatters. The effectiveness of the Security Council as an instrument of enforcing the will of the world, and of keeping the peace, would have been weakened.

Saddam would have remained in power -- with all that entails: More mass graves, more children in prison, and more daily depredations of the Iraqi people.

And Saddam would have remained -- indefinitely -- poised in the heart of the Middle East, sitting atop a potentially deadly arsenal of terrible weapons, threatening his neighbors and the world. For twelve years, Saddam gave every indication that he would never disarm and never comply with the Security Council's just demands. There was no reason to believe that waiting any longer for him to change his mind would yield results.

Those who question the wisdom of removing Saddam Hussein from power, and liberating Iraq, should

ask themselves:

How long should Saddam Hussein have been allowed to torture the Iraqi people?

How long should Saddam Hussein have been allowed to remain the greatest source of instability in one of the world's most vital regions?

How long should Saddam Hussein have been allowed to provide support and safe-haven to terrorists?

How long should Saddam Hussein have been allowed to defy the world's just demand to disarm?

How long should the world have closed its eyes to the threat that was Saddam Hussein?

Let us be clear: those were the alternatives to action.

But President Bush -- and Tony Blair, and John Howard, and Aleksander Kwasniewski, and Jose Maria Aznar, and other leaders -- resolved to take action. Because they did, Saddam Hussein is gone. He will never again use weapons of mass destruction, and his support for terrorism is over. Saddam's torture chambers, and rape rooms, and children's prison cells, are closed. The war on terror is greatly served by the removal of this source of instability in the world's most volatile region.

The people of Iraq are free, and working toward a self-government. Step by step, normal life in Iraq is being reborn, as basic services are restored -- in some cases for the first time in decades. Throughout the country, schools and hospitals are being rebuilt. Banks are opening and a new currency -- without Saddam Hussein's picture -- is being prepared.

America's service men and women, working with Iraqis and coalition forces, are helping to usher in these improvements. Our troops in Baghdad and other cities are operating under difficult conditions. Baathist dead-enders, Fedayeen fighters, and foreign terrorists continue to attack coalition forces, innocent Iraqis, and symbols of progress. As President Bush has said, Iraq is now the central front in the war on terror. Enemies of freedom are making a desperate stand there, and there they must be defeated.

The building of a new Iraq provides a new opportunity for a different kind of Middle East. Today, the 22 countries of this vital region have a combined population of 300 million -- but a combined GDP less than that of Spain. It is a region suffering from what leading Arab intellectuals call a political and economic "freedom deficit". And it is a region where hopelessness provides a fertile ground for ideologies that convince promising youths to aspire not to a university education, a career, or a family, but to blowing themselves up -- taking as many innocent lives with them as possible. These ingredients are a recipe for great instability and pose a direct threat to America's security.

Working in full partnership with the peoples of the region who share our commitment to human freedom, the United States and our friends and allies can help build a Middle East where hope triumphs over bitterness ... where greater political and economic freedom, and better, more modern

education encourage people to reject the path of terror, and instead fully join in the progress of our times. A free, democratic, and successful Iraq can serve as a beacon, and a catalyst, in this effort.

And a free, successful Iraq can help create new momentum toward a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians, and set in motion progress toward the realization of the vision President Bush outlined on June 24th, 2002: two states living side by side in peace and security.

Terrorists in the Palestinian territories have lost the patronage of Saddam Hussein. Other regimes in the region have been given clear warning that support for terror will not be tolerated. Without this outside support for terrorism, Palestinians who are working for reform and long for democracy will, over the long term, be strengthened, and encouraged.

The appeal of terror is still strong -- as we saw last Saturday in Haifa, when 19 people innocently enjoying a Sabbath lunch were murdered. The Palestinian Authority must do its utmost to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure in its midst. A Palestinian state must be a reformed and peaceful state that abandons forever the use of terror.

Israel will be expected to support the creation of a viable and territorially contiguous Palestinian state and fulfill its responsibilities to do so. Israel should dismantle outposts, improve the lives of the Palestinian people and end settlement activity. And the Arab states will be expected to oppose terrorism, support the emergence of a peaceful and democratic Palestine, and state clearly they will live in peace with Israel.

The Middle East is a region of tremendous potential. Yet achieving real transformation in the Middle East will require a commitment of many years. It will require America and our allies to engage broadly throughout the region, across many fronts, including diplomatic, economic, and cultural.

We must remain patient. Our own history should remind us that the union of democratic principle and practice is always a work in progress. When the Founding Fathers said "We the People," they did not mean me. My ancestors were considered three-fifths of a person.

Knowing the difficulties of America's own history, we should always be humble in singing freedom's praises. But America's voice should never waver in speaking out on the side of people seeking freedom.

The people of the Middle East share the desire for freedom. We have an opportunity - and an obligation -- to help them turn this desire into reality. And we must work with others to create a world where terror is shunned and hope is the provenance of every living human. That is the strategic challenge -- and moral mission -- of our time.

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