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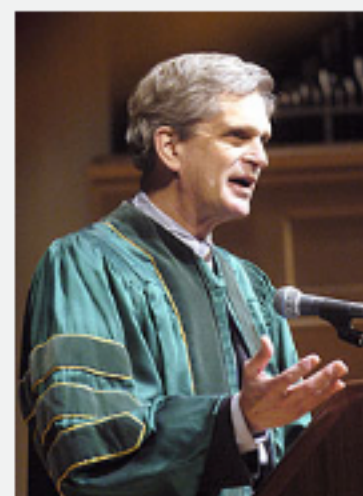
Time and Necessity Will Change Middle East, Says Head of Middle East Institute

February 9, 2005

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. - Time and necessity will change the face of the Middle East, and the United States must be sensitive to issues of Arab pride, nationalism, and culture, according to Ambassador Edward S. Walker, Jr., president and chief executive officer of The Middle East Institute.

Addressing the annual Founders' Day Convocation at Illinois Wesleyan University Wednesday (Feb. 9), Walker called the events of Tuesday when Palestinian and Israeli leaders announced a truce "the most promising development in four years." He added that it could also collapse quickly, "but maybe not."

Walker served as Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs under Secretaries of State Colin Powell and Madeleine Albright. Previously, he was U.S. Ambassador to both Egypt and Israel.



Ambassador Edward S. Walker

• [Listen to the speech \(RealAudio\)](#)

In describing the role that the U.S. should play in the Middle East, Walker said that American dictates will not by themselves cause change but added, "his is not to say that we should remain silent or refrain from encouraging progress. We can and should be part of the solution. But to do this, we need a much clearer sense of Arab pride, nationalism, and culture, and a more sensitive approach towards insinuating our views into the domestic debates taking place in the Arab world."

During his wide-ranging speech, Walker said that setting a timetable for U.S. troops to leave Iraq would be counter productive, playing into the hands of insurgents and terrorists who "believe they can take more pain than we can."

"Our very success has limited our power and our options," he said.

Walker called the election in Iraq a "defining moment" that has put the Shiite religion more directly into the future of Iraq. He also said that the strong turnout for the election had, in fact, weakened the United States political influence on the country. But, he added, America's military presence will remain a critical component for maintaining stability for some time to come.

The fastest road out of the door in Iraq, Walker continued, was getting the Iraqis into "a do-it-yourself mode." However, that may mean that America must accept a democracy that is less than perfect and different than what we might ideally choose.

"The new Iraq will have a strong Islamic character," he predicted. "It may make Islamic law, Shari`ah, as the basis for its legislation. It will most likely make it the basis of a personal law, relating to marriage and divorce. It may not have a strictly equal place for women at first. And it will probably have a good relationship with Iran and possibly with Syria. It most likely will not have a good relationship with Israel, at first. In other words, it will be Arab and Islamic and it will reflect the neighborhood, not the other way around."

Walker added that Americans tend to fear an Islamic regime, particularly a Shiite regime, partly as a reaction to the Iranian hostage crisis of the 1980s but also in response to Al-Qaeda, particularly in relation to the September 11 attacks, and what he termed "its incorrect identification as the mainstream of Islam."

"Our knowledge of Islam is often superficial and tends to be formed by stereotypes and is indiscriminate in recognizing the different trends and some of the perversions that are plaguing the religion," Walker said. "It would be a mistake, therefore, to assume the worst about a Shiite regime in Iraq. There is no fundamental reason why a moderate Shiite regime could not be a responsible and productive member of the region."

The Founders' Day Convocation celebrates the institution's founding in 1850. Illinois Wesleyan President Richard F. Wilson presided over the event and cited the founders' desire to establish an "Institution of Learning which shall shed brightness on all the land around and send down floods of light and blessedness upon generations yet to come."

Said Wilson: "I believe it is instructive for us to recognize what I think I read in these words and in the history of this institution, stretching from that day to this one. And that is the passionate, unwavering belief in the transformative power of education. Underpinning all of these arguments on behalf of this new educational enterprise was the uncompromising sense that education was more than just important, but indispensable."