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# News Transcript

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Thursday, March 20, 2002 -

## DoD News Briefing - Secretary Rumsfeld And Gen. Myers

(Also participating was Gen. Richard B. Myers, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff.)

Rumsfeld: Good morning. The United States and the international community have made every effort to avoid war. Diplomacy and sanctions over more than a decade have not worked. And now, by rejecting President Bush's ultimatum, the Iraqi regime has chosen military conflict over peaceful disarmament.

Coalition forces hit a senior Iraqi leadership compound last evening. The damage assessment on the compound is pending. That was the first. It will likely not be the last. The days of the Saddam Hussein regime are numbered. We continue to feel that there's no need for a broader conflict if the Iraqi leaders act to save themselves and to prevent such further conflict.

What will follow will not be a repeat of any other conflict. It will be of a force and scope and scale that has been beyond what has been seen before. The Iraqi soldiers and officers must ask themselves whether they want to die fighting for a doomed regime or do they want to survive, help the Iraqi people in the liberation of their country and play a role in a new, free Iraq.

If Saddam Hussein or his generals issue orders to use weapons of mass destruction, whether on coalition forces, Free Iraqi Forces, neighboring countries or innocent Iraqi civilians as they have done before, those orders should not be followed. Do not follow orders to destroy dams or flood villages. Do not follow orders to destroy your country's oil, which is the Iraqi people's, and they will need it to rebuild their country when that regime is gone. Following such orders would be to commit crimes against the Iraqi people. See those orders for what they are -- the last desperate gasp of a dying regime. Those who follow orders to commit such crimes will be found and they will be punished. War crimes will be prosecuted, and it will be no excuse to say, "I was just following orders." Any official involved in such crimes will forfeit hope of amnesty or leniency with respect to past actions.

Military units that want to live and act with honor should listen to coalition radio broadcasts to receive instructions as to how you may demonstrate that you do not intend to fight. You will have a place in a

free Iraq if you do the right thing. But if you follow Saddam Hussein's orders, you will share his fate. And the choice is yours.

To the Iraqi people, let me say that the day of your liberation will soon be at hand. Coalition forces will take every precaution to protect innocent civilians. Once hostilities begin, stay in your homes and listen to coalition radio stations for instructions on what to do to remain safe and out of the line of fire. Iraqi civilians: Do not go to work. Stay away from military targets and any facilities where Saddam Hussein has moved military assets.

Arrangements are being made to care for refugees and displaced persons inside of Iraq. There is no need for Iraqis to flee across their borders into neighboring countries. Listen for instructions on how to get food, water and medical supplies. Iraq belongs to the Iraqi people. And once Saddam Hussein's regime is removed, we intend to see that functional and political authority is placed in the hands of Iraqis as quickly as is possible. Coalition forces will stay only as long as necessary to finish the job, and not a day longer.

Let me say a word about our coalition. Already more than 35 nations have publicly associated themselves with the coalition effort in Iraq, and that does not include a large number of other countries that are helping in very important ways but some of which prefer to do so privately at this time. As with the case in Afghanistan, our policy is to accept help from countries on a basis that is comfortable to them and let them characterize how, in fact, they are helping the coalition.

As the operation unfolds, the number of countries publicly associating themselves with the coalition is likely to grow, just as it has with Operation Enduring Freedom. The coalition in Iraq includes countries from every part of the world, including a large number of Muslim-majority countries. Some are supporting the effort publicly; others are doing so privately.

This is not a war against a people. It is not a war against a country. It is most certainly not a war against a religion. It is a war against a regime.

Many countries have committed combat and combat support forces to the effort in Iraq. Others are providing access, basing, overflight, refueling, force protection and intelligence-sharing. Still others have pledged to participate in stability operations and post-Saddam reconstruction efforts. When the situation on the ground permits, the humanitarian activities will go forward promptly. Each coalition member is playing a critical role in the liberation of a repressed people and the disarmament of a dangerous regime.

Finally, to those in our government, let me say a word about security of operational details. It's essential that everyone with access to classified operational details exercise discipline. There is no excuse for anyone revealing sensitive information that will almost certainly put the lives of men and women in uniform at risk. At a time when coalition forces are poised for battle, any compromise of classified information that gives the enemy knowledge of the positions of our forces or the plans or the timing of future operations can result in the death of coalition servicemen and -women. Don't do it.

Let me close by saying that war is the last choice; let there be no doubt. The American people can take comfort in knowing that their country has done everything humanly possible to avoid war and to secure Iraq's peaceful disarmament. We have the greatest fighting forces on the face of the Earth. Our nation is blessed to have so many brave men and women who voluntarily risk their lives to protect our country. As they prepare for battle, the prayers of all Americans are with them and with their families.

The coalition against Iraq, called Operation Iraqi Freedom, is large and growing. This is not a unilateral action, as is being characterized in the media. Indeed, the coalition in this activity is larger than the coalition that existed during the Gulf War in 1991. And that coalition -- those forces are ready and they will prevail. The Iraqi regime will be removed, and with it, the threat it poses to this country and to the world.

General Myers?

Myers: Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Let me add just a few remarks to what the secretary said about operation security. As we approach large-scale operations, our responsibility is to give the troops the best opportunity for success and to protect their lives as best as possible. There are military preparatory actions that need to be accomplished before any major attack. That said, we still want to preserve tactical surprise as much as possible. So we will not confirm or deny any preparatory actions, whether accurate or inaccurate. We will acknowledge the obvious if those actions become visible, but give little details, as the secretary just did on the strike on an Iraqi leadership target. Many of these preparatory actions in the hours ahead are vital to the lives of our troops and the safety and security of Iraq's neighbors. I know our nation and our friends and allies will understand and support these efforts.

There's been much talk about how easy this conflict could be. Let me assure you that we do not regard combat as an easy task. Warfare is dangerous, we will have casualties. But I'll tell you that our troops are the best trained and the best led in the world. They understand their mission to defend America, and they will carry out their mission successfully.

Let me reassure you that when full-scale combat operations begin, we will make the appropriate announcement and provide information on some of those preparatory actions that were accomplished.

Finally, to join in with the secretary, we wish Godspeed to all the soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, and civilians from the U.S. and our coalition forces who may find themselves in harm's way.

With that, we'll take your questions.

Q: General Myers, you had said earlier that Saddam Hussein is not a target of the war. How do you reconcile that with the first strikes being cruise missile strikes on where Saddam Hussein might be?

Myers: Regime leadership command and control is a legitimate target in any conflict, and that was the target that was struck last night.

Rumsfeld: Charlie?

Q: Mr. Secretary, two quick ones, if I may. Did you have information --

Rumsfeld: With all this crowd, why don't we just try one?

Q: All right. You said a leadership compound was struck. Did you have information Saddam might have been there?

And quickly, there are also reports from southern Iraq that oil fires have begun. Is there any information that the Iraqis might have begun setting their oil fields on fire?

Rumsfeld: I thought we agreed on just one.

Q: All right, let's go with the oil one.

Rumsfeld: We're not on the ground. I have seen indication and reports from people that there may be -- that the Iraqi regime may have set fire to as many as three or four of the oil wells in the south. And we're in the process of attempting to get additional information on that.

(To General Myers) Is that your information as well?

Myers: That's correct.

Q: Do you plan to try and move quickly to stop that, if --

Rumsfeld: Needless to say, it is a crime for that regime to be destroying the riches of the Iraqi people. And -- but I'm not going to get into operational details.

Myers: And the people that are carrying it out from the regime are part of that crime.

Q: When you --

Myers: Are part of that crime.

Q: Are what, sir?

Myers: They're part of that crime, the people that are carrying this out, carrying these orders out.

Rumsfeld: Yes?

Q: Mr. Secretary, if indeed we missed Saddam last night, what does that do to the Iraqi spirit? And does it provide an early propaganda victory for the regime?

Rumsfeld: You know, I'm not into the tick-tock of every hour and every minute. We have a serious task before us and it is to remove that regime and find the weapons of mass destruction, and replace it with a government that does not want those weapons and will not threaten its neighbor and will maintain a single country. This is a process that takes some time, and it will ebb and flow. And when it's over, the regime will be gone.

Q: Mr. Secretary, you and other officials have emphasized how massive the actual attack on Iraq will be once it starts, urging the Iraqi military not to fight. Is it also your hope that some elements of the military might remove Saddam themselves? And how would you assess the chance of that?

Rumsfeld: I don't think it's possible to assess the chances, but there's no question that the people of Iraq and the people of the region have to know that his days are numbered, he's not going to be there. In some period of time, he's gone and that regime is gone, to the great benefit of the Iraqi people. They'll

be liberated. There are various ways it could happen. One way is that the people of Iraq close to him could decide that he's no longer of value to the country -- which would be the understatement of the morning. He could decide it's time to leave and he'd prefer to stay alive and find a way to escape.

There will be Iraqis that will surrender. There will be Iraqis that offer to help us. There will be Iraqis who offer not only to help us but to help liberate the country and to free the Iraqi people. The more of them there are, the greater the chance that the war will be limited and less broad.

Rumsfeld: The fewer there are, the risks that it will be broader and more difficult, take more time, and more lives will be lost.

Q: Mr. Secretary, what evidence do you have that it's actually working, that there are actually Iraqis who are heeding this call to --

Rumsfeld: We have evidence.

Q: And what sort of evidence is that?

Rumsfeld: Good evidence.

Yes?

Q: Mr. Secretary, do you have reason to believe that Saddam Hussein was at the compound that was struck last night, or his sons, for that matter?

Rumsfeld: We had what I would characterize as very good intelligence that it was a senior Iraqi leadership compound. We do not know what the battle damage assessment will be when that type of information is available to us. We -- and I'll leave it right there.

Pam?

Q: Mr. Secretary, at about the same time that this strike began in Iraq, there was a new assault launched in southern Afghanistan, involving several thousand troops from 82nd Airborne. Is that a coincidence, or is that an intentional message to show that this war in Iraq is not taking away any attention from the war against al Qaeda?

Rumsfeld: Well, I don't know that I'd say there's a connection.

Rumsfeld: It isn't taking anything away from the war against al Qaeda. And indeed the pressure will be helpful because there have been and are al Qaeda in that country.

Myers: It is a separate operation, it is not connected, and would have been coincidence.

Rumsfeld: We're going to have this question and then your question, and then that'll be it.

Q: Thank you.

(Cross talk)

Q: Mr. Secretary, do you believe in fact that the man on the tape that was run on Iraqi TV last night was, in fact, Saddam Hussein?

Rumsfeld: There is debate about that. I have no inside information.

Q: Have you seen any indication that his son, Uday, has taken control of the country?

Rumsfeld: No.

Q: Mr. Secretary, at the White House last night, a senior White House official after the president spoke said that the decision to make the strike was made some time between 6:30 and 7:00 Eastern time. It's apparent that that decision to strike was not in line with what we have been led to believe about the war plan. Was the intelligence you got fragile enough where you felt you had to go at that moment and not start with, say, shock and awe or some other phase of the war?

Rumsfeld: Well, Dick, calibrate me, but the first thing I'd say is I don't believe you have the war plan -- (laughter) -- a fact which does not make me unhappy. (Laughter.)

Second, any war plan reflects the reality that one would take opportunities that present themselves. And certainly, there's no war -- a war plan is something that is a plan that's developed before things start. And the minute things start, one has to take account of the realities that you find in the world. And that is what was done last evening. That is what will be done today and tomorrow and the next day. And to not do that would be a terrible mistake.

Myers: Having intel agencies and armed forces that are flexible is key to victory, and that's what you saw.

(Cross talk.)

Rumsfeld: I really -- really wasn't kidding when I said I think that that will be the last question.

Let me just make a comment. I did not answer a question as fully as I might have about do we have evidence that it's working. I often try to put myself in other people's shoes and ask myself, in this case, for example, an Iraqi citizen or Iraqi army soldier or an Iraqi officer, or even a Special Republican Guard official, or even people closer to Saddam Hussein. What they have to be seeing is a good deal of evidence that the Iraqi people want to be liberated. We see a great deal of evidence of that. It's a natural human tendency for people that have been brutally repressed. It manifests itself in a host of ways. We see evidence of military personnel, some have already surrendered in Kuwait. We are in communication with still more people who are officials of the military at various levels -- the regular army, the Special Republican -- the Republican Guard, the Special Republican Guard, who are increasingly aware that it's going to happen, he's going to be gone.

And what they are probably doing -- I can't do this perfectly, but as I try to put myself in their shoes -- they have to be fearful of that regime because that regime kills people every day to enforce obedience and discipline. So they have to be fearful of the regime. On the other hand, once they are persuaded that that regime is history, it is going, it will not be there, in some reasonably finite period of time they will be gone, then their behavior begins to tip and change. And the -- when I said we have good evidence, we have not only good evidence but we have broad and deep evidence that suggests that there are people going through that decision-making process throughout that country today, and that is a good

thing.

Thank you very much.

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