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Presenter: Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld

Friday, April 11, 2003 - 2:00 p.m. EDT

DoD News Briefing - Secretary Rumsfeld and Gen. Myers

(Also participating Gen. Richard B. Myers, chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. Slides from today's briefing are located at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Apr2003/g030411-D-6570C.html>.)

Rumsfeld: Good afternoon. Wednesday's events in Baghdad were remarkable, and yet, the same day, as liberated Iraqis were celebrating their new-found freedom, we lost an American Marine in a firefight in Baghdad and suffered a number of wounded, a sad reminder that the situation in Iraq is still dangerous, and that a good deal of work remains.

The scenes we've witnessed in Baghdad and other free Iraqi cities belie the widespread early commentary suggesting that Iraqis were ambivalent or even opposed to the coalition's arrival in their country. I think it's fair to say that they were not ambivalent or opposed, but they were understandably frightened of the regime of Saddam Hussein and the retaliation or retribution that they could have suffered. And now, as their fear of the former Iraqi dictator lessens, the true sentiments of a large majority, I believe, of the Iraqi people are surfacing. And I think it's increasingly clear that most welcome coalition forces and see them not as invaders or occupiers, but as liberators.

The images of thousands of cheering Iraqis, celebrating and embracing coalition forces, are being broadcast throughout the world, including the Arab world. And possibly for the first time, Arab people are seeing the people of Iraq waving American flags and thanking the men and women in uniform for risking their lives to free them from tyranny. I think it's important that that message be seen, for America is a friend of Arab people. And now, finally, Arab people are hearing the same message, not from U.S. officials, but from their fellow Arabs, the liberated people of Iraq.

Meanwhile, we're working to expand the flow of free information to the Iraqi people. We're moving a ground station to Baghdad to expand the coverage area for radio and television broadcasts. We've begun broadcasting a one-hour news program and are moving to restore Iraqi radio and television

networks. We're doing this because access to free information is critical to building a free society.

At the same time, we're working with free Iraqis, those in liberated areas, and those who have returned from abroad, to establish -- begin the process of establishing -- an interim authority which will help pave the way for a new Iraqi government, a government that will be chosen by the Iraqi people, not by anyone else, and based on democratic principles and peaceful coexistence with its neighbors and with the world. The makeup of this interim authority and the government that emerges from it will be decided by the free Iraqi people.

In areas where the war is winding down, coalition forces are bringing humanitarian aid and are working with a number of international organizations in other countries to deliver food, water, medicine and other necessities.

General Myers.

Myers: Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

First, let me pass on our regrets to the families of those Iraqis killed at a checkpoint near An Nasiriyah today. Marines fired on a van with blacked-out windows after it bypassed the warning signs, failed to heed verbal and hand warnings to stop, and after it penetrated a serpentine obstacle. Two children were killed; nine adults were injured. The injured are being treated by U.S. personnel. So, to the Iraqi people, a reminder to please stop for checkpoints. We do not wish to harm innocent people.

On the operational front, coalition forces continue to secure and stabilize cities and thoroughfares around Iraq, and to focus combat operations in those areas where resistance continues. Over the past 24 hours, coalition air forces have flown more than 1,000 sorties over Iraq, and we continue to provide urban close air support to our ground forces in and around Baghdad and throughout Iraq.

Coalition ground forces continue to clear and secure the remainder of Baghdad. In the north, ground forces and special forces are securing Kirkuk and Mosul and are degrading regime forces in and near Tikrit. This work in the north also includes the beginning of securing the northern oil fields. Coalition ground and sea forces are also maintaining security on the Al-Faw peninsula, the port at Umm Qasar, and Basra, and in the southern oil fields.

We continue to strike key leadership targets when and where we find them. Earlier today, General Brooks showed you some "playing cards" some of our forces are using to identify regime leadership. And we have posted these on DefenseLink.

More still remains to be done, as the secretary said. We have to continue to create the conditions for a stable environment so the Iraqis can determine their own future. We must find and eliminate weapons of mass destruction, and we must get the humanitarian assistance to the Iraqis who need it.

As far as our engagement in Iraq is concerned, you've got to be reminded of Churchill's quote -- I certainly am -- "This is not the end, it is not even the beginning of the end, but it's perhaps the end of the beginning."

And with that, we'll take your questions.

Rumsfeld: Charlie?

Q: Mr. Secretary, you spoke of the television pictures that went around the world earlier of Iraqis welcoming U.S. forces with open arms. But now television pictures are showing looting and other signs of lawlessness. Are you, sir, concerned that what's being reported from the region as anarchy in Baghdad and other cities might wash away the goodwill the United States has built? And, are U.S. troops capable of or inclined to be police forces in Iraq?

Rumsfeld: Well, I think the way to think about that is that if you go from a repressive regime that has -- it's a police state, where people are murdered and imprisoned by the tens of thousands -- and then you go to something other than that -- a liberated Iraq -- that you go through a transition period. And in every country, in my adult lifetime, that's had the wonderful opportunity to do that, to move from a repressed dictatorial regime to something that's freer, we've seen in that transition period there is untidiness, and there's no question but that that's not anyone's choice.

On the other hand, if you think of those pictures, very often the pictures are pictures of people going into the symbols of the regime -- into the palaces, into the boats, and into the Ba'ath Party headquarters, and into the places that have been part of that repression. And, while no one condones looting, on the other hand, one can understand the pent-up feelings that may result from decades of repression and people who have had members of their family killed by that regime, for them to be taking their feelings out on that regime.

With respect to the second part of your question, we do feel an obligation to assist in providing security, and the coalition forces are doing that. They're patrolling in various cities. Where they see looting, they're stopping it, and they will be doing so. The second step, of course, is to not do that on a permanent basis but, rather, to find Iraqis who can assist in providing police support in those cities and various types of stabilizing and security assistance, and we're in the process of doing that.

Q: How quickly do you hope to do that? Isn't that a pressing problem?

Rumsfeld: Wait. Wait. But in answer to your -- direct answer to your question -- are we concerned that this would offset it, the feeling of liberation -- suggests that, "Gee, maybe they were better off repressed." And I don't think there's anyone in any of those pictures, or any human being who's not free, who wouldn't prefer to be free, and recognize that you pass through a transition period like this and accept it as part of the price of getting from a repressed regime to freedom.

Myers: Charlie, another point, I think, to make is that it's uneven throughout the country. In the south, where we've been for some time, where the clerics have been speaking out against looting and for civil order, where some of the Iraqis citizens themselves are saying let's don't loot, and that sort of thing, that actually the situation is pretty good. In Umm Qasr it's in good shape. In Basra, looting has been going down over time as we track it. So as we go up from the south, it's getting better and better for obvious reasons. So --

Rumsfeld: Let me say one other thing. The images you are seeing on television you are seeing over, and over, and over, and it's the same picture of some person walking out of some building with a vase, and you see it 20 times, and you think, "My goodness, were there that many vases?" (Laughter.) "Is it possible that there were that many vases in the whole country?"

Q: Do you think that the words "anarchy" and "lawlessness" are ill-chosen --

Rumsfeld: Absolutely. I picked up a newspaper today and I couldn't believe it. I read eight headlines that talked about chaos, violence, unrest. And it just was Henny Penny -- "The sky is falling." I've never seen anything like it! And here is a country that's being liberated, here are people who are going from being repressed and held under the thumb of a vicious dictator, and they're free. And all this newspaper could do, with eight or 10 headlines, they showed a man bleeding, a civilian, who they claimed we had shot -- one thing after another. It's just unbelievable how people can take that away from what is happening in that country!

Do I think those words are unrepresentative? Yes.

Q: Mr. Secretary, could I follow that up?

Rumsfeld: Sure! (Laughter.) I think it deserves a follow- up! (More laughter.)

Q: You seem ready for the --

Rumsfeld: Let's go get that newspaper! (Laughter.)

Q: I think the question is, if you -- if a foreign military force came into your neighborhood and did away with the police, and left you at the mercy of criminals, how long would you feel liberated?

Rumsfeld: Well, that's a fair question. First of all, the foreign military force came into their neighborhood and did not do away with any police. There may have been some police who fled, because the people didn't like them, and because they'd been doing things to the people in the local community that the people wanted to have a word with them about. But we haven't gone in and done away with any police. In fact, we're looking for police in those villages and towns who can, in fact, assist in providing order, to the extent there are people who can do it in a manner that's consistent with our values.

Q: A follow-up to that --

(Cross talk.)

Q: I'll follow-up his follow-up, if I may.

Q: Was there --

Rumsfeld: Maybe, maybe not.

Q: Given how predictable the lack of law and order was, as you said, from past conflicts, was there part of General Franks' plan to deal with it? And --

Rumsfeld: Of course.

Q: Well, what is it?

Rumsfeld: This is fascinating. This is just fascinating. From the very beginning, we were convinced that we would succeed, and that means that that regime would end. And we were convinced that as we went from the end of that regime to something other than that regime, there would be a period of transition. And, you cannot do everything instantaneously; it's never been done, everything instantaneously. We did, however, recognize that there was at least a chance of catastrophic success, if you will, to reverse the phrase, that you could in a given place or places have a victory that occurred well before reasonable people might have expected it, and that we needed to be ready for that; we needed to be ready with medicine, with food, with water. And, we have been.

And, you say, "Well, what was it in the plan?" The plan is a complex set of conclusions or ideas that then have a whole series of alternative excursions that one can do, depending on what happens. And, they have been doing that as they've been going along. And, they've been doing a darn good job.

Q: Yes, but Mr. Secretary, I'm asking about what plan was there to restore law and order?

Rumsfeld: Well, let's just take a city. Take the port city, Umm Qasr -- what the plan was. Well, the British went in, they built a pipeline bringing water in from Kuwait; they cleared the mine of ports (sic); they brought ships in with food; they've been providing security. In fact, they've done such a lousy job, that the city has gone from 15,000 to 40,000. Now think of that. Why would people vote with their feet and go into this place that's so bad? The reason they're going in is because they're food, there's water, there's medicine and there's jobs. That's why. The British have done a fantastic job. They've done an excellent job.

And, does that mean you couldn't go in there and take a television camera or get a still photographer

and take a picture of something that was imperfect, untidy? I could do that in any city in America. Think what's happened in our cities when we've had riots, and problems, and looting. Stuff happens! But in terms of what's going on in that country, it is a fundamental misunderstanding to see those images over, and over, and over again of some boy walking out with a vase and say, "Oh, my goodness, you didn't have a plan." That's nonsense. They know what they're doing, and they're doing a terrific job. And it's untidy, and freedom's untidy, and free people are free to make mistakes and commit crimes and do bad things. They're also free to live their lives and do wonderful things, and that's what's going to happen here.

Q: Can I do a quick follow-up?

Q: Mr. Secretary?

Q: Mr. Secretary?

Rumsfeld: I think I'll go over here.

Q: How about my follow-up, Mr. Secretary?

Rumsfeld: Well, we're considering it. (Laughter.)

Q: There's some additional specificity here. While you have just expressed yet again your dismay at the international news media, in fact, the reporting does factually show there are some certain number of Iraqi citizens that have spoken on-camera quite directly about their own concerns about the safety and security in Baghdad and that situation. There have also been absolutely verified reports that it is not just regime targets but indeed hospitals, banks, other facilities essential to society. The ICRC has been on TV today saying that hospitals are being looted, not regime targets you're speaking of, and that they can't even get there to resupply these essential hospitals.

Now, my question is, General Brooks said this morning that the military -- U.S. military -- did not want to reconstruct the Iraqi police force in Baghdad because the feeling of the U.S. military is that that Iraqi police force has been operating against the U.S. military. He didn't feel that was a secure solution. So with some specificity, what type of Iraqi force can you bring to bear in Baghdad to have Iraqis help restore security? And, what types of specific tasks are you now going to assign the U.S. military to do to help restore the situation, which the people of Baghdad appear to be concerned about?

Myers: (Laughs.)

Rumsfeld: Well, hospitals. No, let's go back to what you said about people.

You could take a camera and a microphone, and stick it in front of a thousand people in Iraq today, and you could find someone saying every single thing you've said and every single thing I've said.

You're going to find it all across the spectrum. You know, it's the facts on the ground where a person is that determines how they feel about it. And, there are some very dangerous places in that country and some very difficult situations.

And, there is no question but there is a hospital that was looted. There also is this fact. The Saddam Hussein regime and the Ba'ath Party put their headquarters in hospitals all over that country. They have been doing it systematically. Have we been complaining about that? Have we been photographing that? Have we been bemoaning that? No! Why? Because there wasn't a free press. You couldn't get in to do it; you'd get thrown out. You'd get thrown in jail if you were an Iraqi and you tried to do it.

A hundred and twenty-three schools were Ba'ath Party headquarters. Is that a good thing to do to a school? Is that a good thing to do to a hospital? No. But was there any complaint about it? No, there was no complaint. Is it true that a hospital was looted? Yes. Is that unfortunate? Yes. Do we have medicines and medical supplies coming in behind to help the people in those situations? You bet we do.

Q: But I guess what I'm not hearing here is, either one of you gentlemen, what tasks, with some specificity if you can, what U.S. military forces in Baghdad will now be doing to help calm the situation, or do you just --

Rumsfeld: They're already doing it. They're already going to hospitals that are being looted and stopping it. If you look carefully, you'll see images of people being arrested for looting, and they're walking out with those little white things on their wrists and said "Don't do that." And, they take them out of there and they tell them to go someplace else. And, that's happening all over the place.

Myers: Here's the --

Rumsfeld: Our folks are operating to the extent they can in Baghdad in creating a presence and dissuading people from looting. And, for suddenly the biggest problem in the world to be looting is really notable.

Myers: Can I --

Rumsfeld: (Inaudible) -- nice euphemism for what's going on. You bet.

Myers: This is the Baghdad report on humanitarian affairs. As you know, we have civil affairs units that go right with -- embedded with our combat units. They go into all these cities. They're in Baghdad right now. Here's the report for today:

Combat operations continue in many parts of the city; what you've already said.

Many residents are returning to the city.

Water: Sixty percent capacity. That's probably pre-war, but I don't know, pre-war capacity.

Electric power down on the west side of the city; emergency power to critical facilities. So they're getting emergency power to the critical facilities.

Food: Adequate supplies are stockpiled. ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross] warehouse secured by coalition forces. Food warehouse has not been looted, as has been reported.

Medical: All hospitals are all operating, at reduced rates. ICRC is supplying water and generators available. Large patient load, and on and on it goes. But those are some specifics, though. We're in there, working all those issues. That's always been part of the plan. This is a transition period between war and what we hope, hopefully, will be a much more peaceful time.

Rumsfeld: Yeah?

Q: If I may, Secretary Rumsfeld -- Terry Call (sp) from the (inaudible word) Newspaper Group -- let me ask a question that is relevant to your duties as Secretary of Defense, of -- and General Myers, as the chairman, for a very successful military operation. And, that relevant question is, could both of you address how consistent with your optimistic and most hopeful results has the military operation been to date? And correspondingly, do you and General Myers have the same confidence, in a straightforward way, that the rebuilding of Iraq as a successful society, with American assistance, will be consistent, as you've tried to describe to the group here?

(Pause.) Are we -- (off mike) -- militarily, sir, as you expect in six months we may be regarding the civil affairs matters?

(Pause.)

Rumsfeld: I had a list, a long list, of three or four, five, six pages of things that could go wrong, because I tend to be conservative and cautious. And I looked it over this morning, and a number, a large number, haven't happened bad.

Q: (Off mike) -- the list?

Rumsfeld: Just a minute.

Q: Okay. (Scattered laughter.)

Rumsfeld: Just a minute, Pam. In fact, I may not even come back to you. (Laughter.)

Some of them are still open -- that could still go bad. There's no question about that. There's still some tough stuff ahead, and -- but one has to say that the speed that was used and the care that was used in the targeting, and the tactical surprise that was achieved by starting the ground war before the air war, undoubtedly contributed to the fact that a number of those things didn't happen bad. The oil well weren't all blown up, and there's not a major humanitarian crisis, despite the fact that someone's looting someplace. There were not large refugees numbers. There were not large internally displaced people numbers. So we feel good about that.

The task we've got ahead of us now is an awkward one, because you have to go from a transition -- from a repressed regime to an unrepressed regime that is free to do good things and also do bad things, and we're going to see both. And, we expect that, and we also expect people to report both. That's fine.

But as we go through this, I feel that we've got a group of wonderful people who have thought this through, that are engaged in the process, that have done the planning that will see that the kinds of food, and medicine, and water, and assistance that are needed will happen. Will it be perfect? No. Will it be bumpy? Sure. How do you go from -- take a -- look at every other country that's done this. Look at East Germany, and Romania, and the Soviet Union, pieces of that -- it isn't an easy thing to do. And, we can't do it for them; the Iraqi people are going to have to do this, in the last analysis. We can help, and we want to create an environment that is as secure as possible, and that is as stable as possible, so that they can find their sea legs, if you will, and get themselves on a path to the future.

Q: Mr. Secretary?

Myers: Can I -- can I tag --

Rumsfeld: Excuse me. Go ahead.

Myers: Let me tag onto the end of that, because I think I do have confidence. This is -- and I said earlier that it's uneven throughout the country; that in the south the conditions are generally better. I think the conditions for Baghdad -- Baghdad is a city that is still not controlled by the coalition, where fighting and killing is still going on. Those conditions I read don't sound too bad.

Let me give you Basra, a place we've been a little bit longer, and tell you what the situation is there. Looting has subsided. Still some civilian disturbances. The U.K. is patrolling the city. Water supplies are adequate. Electricity restored throughout the city. Food supply is adequate. Medical facilities are functioning at prewar levels. And there's a plan there to get the police, those that have been vetted, not Ba'athists, to come back in and take over some of their old jobs.

So it is uneven throughout the country, but that should give us confidence that this is working exactly as the plan was supposed to work.

Q: Secretary Rumsfeld, just one more question on the issue of this plan. General Pace said yesterday that there are feelers being made to other coalition members to provide police units.

Rumsfeld: Not feelers, requests.

Q: Requests.

Rumsfeld: We're out there -- we've had a big meeting on it today already, and we're working the problem.

Q: Is this something that could have been lined up in advance so that they were actually --

Rumsfeld: Well, you have international people already connected. Most people wanted to defer a final decision until the war -- some of them -- some of them require a U.N. resolution, they think. Some think they require action by their parliament. Some think they would want to wait until they were in -- what do you call it? -- stability phase, phase four, as opposed to a kinetic phase. And so it varies from country to country.

We have a number of countries lined up already, and what we're now doing is going through and nailing down the kinds of assistance. I met today with the deputy minister of defense of Singapore, Dick and I did, and he's offered medical units and he's offered various other things. And it's all now just getting nailed and it's moving in. Already a number of countries have things moving into the country.

Q: (Off mike.)

Q: You couldn't have done it any faster?

Rumsfeld: That's wonderful. Are we in a quagmire? (Laughter.) Huh? Is that where we are? Come on!

Q: (Off mike.)

Q: Mr. Secretary?

Q: The Churchill quote was a good one, but does it not --

Rumsfeld: That was Dick.

Q: Yes. But does it not seem more like the beginning of the end rather than the end of the beginning? What is your assessment on the end of the Saddam Hussein regime?

Rumsfeld: I'll stick with Dick. (Laughter.)

Q: Mr. Secretary?

Q: General Myers? General Myers, can we talk about the current ongoing combat operations, what you're seeing, or could you describe the fighting in al Qaim in the west, and what's being seen there?

Myers: We haven't got our afternoon update, but my guess is the fighting in al Qaim probably is drawing -- will be drawing -- to a close here shortly. There have been intelligence reports that the leaders in al Qaim want to surrender, and so I think that's going to be worked out today, tomorrow. And, we have done our sensitive site exploitation of the sites that we were interested in, were in there and have looked at them. Results pending. In the north, things are relatively quiet. You know how that happened in the north. The forces up there essentially capitulated, left their equipment in place and just left, and it remains fairly stable.

There are still, enemy targets north of Baghdad, in Tikrit, and some other of the major cities that are going to -- (we have to deal with those ?).

Q: If I could follow up, Mr. Secretary. You've said numerous times from this podium that Syria's actions have been notably unhelpful. Can you definitively say what Syria is doing or not doing today as far as this conflict goes? What are your comments on Syria's role today?

Rumsfeld: Well, I observed and Secretary Powell observed that that country has been unhelpful. They've been unhelpful in several respects. They have been unhelpful in the sense that they were allowing military equipment to go into Iraq at a time when we were engaged in a conflict there. And that's something for which we have a minimum of high regard. The second thing I would say is they have been allowing people to go into that country, and people who were intending to oppose coalition forces. We don't like that, either. Third, they have allowed people to come out of that country into their country and either stay or transit. None of these things are helpful.

Q: Has it continued?

Rumsfeld: We've not seen any night goggles going in in the last 15 minutes. But are there people still moving out of the country into Syria? Yes.

Q: Mr. Secretary, why don't you just update us a little bit on what progress you're making, if any, on some of the unfinished missions you outlined the other day, specifically accounting for senior regime leadership, such as the ones on these playing cards that were distributed today, the search for weapons of mass destruction, and what about the American prisoners of war? Can you tell us you're making any progress on any of those three fronts?

Rumsfeld: I think, I hope when I spoke those words that I prefaced it by saying the first task is to

prevail in this conflict and to stop the forces of Saddam Hussein in the areas that they continue to operate in, and to reduce the violence. That is the principle assignment. And, then to point out how much work was still ahead of us, I listed all of these six, eight, 10 things that are on our priority list. They will, of necessity, follow along behind, although, as I said, when there happens to be a weapon of mass destruction suspect site in an area that we occupy, and if people have time, they'll look at it. And, then they'll send things out to be examined and looked at. We clearly have people dedicated to trying to find the prisoners of war, ours and others from the '91 war. And as we are successful in any of those things, we'll report them. Undoubtedly, there will be embedded reporters there when they happen and will report them.

But I don't have anything particular to note, except that there are documentations that have been retrieved and they are being looked at. We are looking for people. We continue to look for people who can help us find the people we want to find, and people who can help us find the weapon sites of interest and people who can help us find records, for example, of Ba'ath Party members and the like. But I don't have anything of note to report.

Q: Of those 50-more-plus people who were listed today on the most wanted list, can you account for any of those at this point?

Rumsfeld: Sure. Some aren't there.

Q: How many?

Rumsfeld: I don't know. Who keeps count? (Laughs, laughter.)

Q: Mr. Secretary, in the -- going back to Baghdad for a minute. Are there steps that are being taken, for instance, increasing the number of troops there, declaring curfews --

Rumsfeld: There's more troops coming into the country every day.

Q: -- (inaudible) -- protecting installations like hospitals with, you know --

Rumsfeld: Let's take them one at a time. Yes. Yes. Yes. There are more troops moving into the Baghdad area every day, as well as other cities. There's more medicine arriving to help with hospitals. There is a curfew, I believe, in Baghdad.

Myers: Yes, there is.

Q: Throughout Baghdad?

Rumsfeld: Except for daylight hours, throughout Baghdad. We don't control all of Baghdad, but we've suggested a curfew.

Q: Mr. Secretary, may I do the follow-up, please, just to his follow-up? A very good question.

Rumsfeld: Why don't you just do an original one?

Myers: Yeah, it's been so long. Why don't you come up with one --

(Scattered laughter.)

Q: I'll do an original question, and I'll phrase, then, to General Myers -- (inaudible). General, going back to the security environment that the secretary talked about, have you considered possibly using a reservoir of talent that exists in this country -- retired policemen and police chiefs, many of whom have volunteered to go over and help, many of whom speak Arabic?

Myers: I think the answer would be yes. In -- it's exactly -- this is perhaps more the secretary's answer than mine, but in putting together the team that is looking at how we do our assistance, after the kinetic piece of the conflict is over, it's exactly the kind of people we're looking for.

And, so all that is being bundled up, and people have been calling to volunteer. I know we have medical personnel that want to help -- police and many others, plus we're picking people that have expertise in many different areas, so they can go in and help mentor those Iraqis who will be running the various ministries as they stand back up and the communities around that country. So yes.

Q: Are you concerned that the ransacking of government offices may have destroyed some of the evidence and paperwork trail of war crimes that we hoped to prosecute? Are you taking any steps to secure that?

Rumsfeld: As best we can. We're certainly looking for records. There's no question but that embassies around the world, and the intelligence agencies, and the Ba'ath Party headquarters, and the SSO offices and the special Republican Guard headquarters all had records. And, would it be nice to have all those records? You bet. Will we get some of them?

Q: (Off mike) -- anything like that?

Rumsfeld: You bet. We've -- we have offered two things. One is financial rewards. And, we've also said that if people have spotty backgrounds, assisting us might make their futures brighter.

Q: Mr. Secretary, if I could --

Q: Sir, I had a follow-up on the weapons of mass destruction issue. We keep hearing "results are pending, results are pending" of these early finds. What can --

Rumsfeld: Of which one of this --

Q: Well, the finding weapons of mass destruction. Here's my question: What can you guarantee the U.S. public and a skeptical world that U.S. soldiers will eventually find, without any shadow of a doubt in your mind, by way of raw agents, weapons facilities? And how long should they wait before they start making conclusions that maybe the U.S. didn't have the evidence in the first place?

Rumsfeld: You know, I've got a lot of confidence in the American people.

Q: No, no, what will the --

Rumsfeld: You said how long should they wait, how should they -- before they lose -- I've got a lot of confidence in the American people. I do not deny for a minute that there's just an enormous, insatiable appetite to get every piece of information yesterday. And, I'm afraid that when you're fighting a war, that's not your first problem. So they're out there trying to keep people from getting killed, and trying to provide the security, and trying to prevent the looting. And, there are a long list of tasks that we have to do, and we will do them.

Secretary Powell presented a presentation to the United Nations and the world. He laid out intelligence community estimates from the Central Intelligence Agency, and there is not a doubt but that we will, over a period of time, find people who can tell us where to go look for those things. We are not going to find them, in my view, just as I never believed the inspectors would, by running around seeing if they can open a door and surprise somebody and find something, because these people have learned that they can live in an inspection environment -- the Iraqis did; they functioned in that environment, they designed their workplaces to do that. Things were mobile, things were underground, things were in tunnels, things were hidden, things were dispersed. Now, are we going to find that? No. It's a big country. What we're going to do is we're going to find the people who will tell us that, and we're going to find ways to encourage them to tell us that.

Q: Can I ask a follow-up? I asked General Myers last week that Secretary Powell, in his February 5th presentation, highlighted weapons -- warheads, biological warheads, that were purportedly moved to the U.S. I asked him if the U.S. had tracked any of those, since those were tangible pieces of hardware, and he was unaware at the moment, at that time --

Rumsfeld: Who was that?

Q: General Myers.

Myers: That was me. (Laughter.) But it was a correct report, it was a correct -- it was a correct report. I went back and did my research, it's absolutely right.

Q: Okay.

Myers: And we tracked it as far as we could track it, and that's the end of that.

Q: (Off mike.)

Myers: Don't know.

Rumsfeld: Bill?

Q: This is a "Where is Saddam" question. Have the coalition forces secured the -

Rumsfeld: Oh, no. Not really? Is that he said? "Where is Saddam question"?

Q: Yeah. Have coalition forces secured the Mansour area, where the major leadership attack took place? And, based on the results of that attack, things seemed to collapse right after that. Do you have any better opinion yet of the fate of Saddam?

Rumsfeld: Correct me if I'm wrong, but my recollection is that they have not secured that area. First of all, most of these places, these sites, are not like this press room. These are big places with lots of acres, and underground bunkers, and the like.

You're talking about the Dorma Farm, the first night?

Q: No, the most recent one.

Q: No, no. The restaurant.

Rumsfeld: Oh, the most recent one, the other one?

Q: Mansour district.

Rumsfeld: Yeah. Well, there was -- there were two places. One was a restaurant, and one was a house nearby. And the question is, who was in what, if anybody? And the answer is . . . Do we have ground truth there? And the answer is no.

Q: Well, have you gotten to that site, though? Are you looking for the ground truth here?

Rumsfeld: Currently we're looking. The question is a priority list. Have you -- what do you do first? The first thing you do is to try to end the war, and to stop people from killing people, or stop people from blowing up trucks in people's faces, and stop people from doing a whole series of things that are

unhelpful, stop them from burning the oil wells.

Q: Well, on the top list, you said must capture or otherwise deal with --

Rumsfeld: I didn't say "must" to any of these. I said these are on our priority list.

Q: -- must capture or otherwise deal with Saddam Hussein and his sons --

Rumsfeld: No "musts." No "must."

Q: Mr. Secretary --

(Cross talk.)

Rumsfeld: It's part of it -- Saddam Hussein and his sons. That's right. Blacklist. Fifty people, plus more. You have lots of things on the list.

(Cross talk.)

Q: Well, on a very small, knowable question, have the U.S. forces actually reached that site in the city --

Rumsfeld: I'll be right with you.

Can you answer his question? Jamie's question?

Myers: I cannot answer it.

Q: You don't --

Myers: We'll check on it.

Rumsfeld: I just don't know. But I will say this. If we did, we might not have found anything anyway.

Q: I just want to know if you got --

Rumsfeld: You're going to have to find people who were there, who tell you what happened, or else you're going to have to start digging in rubble. I mean, that's just a fact. That's a reality.

Myers: And I think our priorities now would not be to be digging in rubble. We have fighting to do in Baghdad. It could be -- well be in area that is not so rubble -- and that kind of work is not -- that's next.

Rumsfeld: We'll make this the last question.

Myers: Rubble's not --

Q: Mr. Secretary --

Rumsfeld: Don't make a follow-up. Just ask a fresh, straight-out question.

Q: We're hearing reports of communications intercepts of Iraqis discussing Saddam's death. Are you hearing that? Are there any communications intercepts along that line?

Rumsfeld: I have heard people talk about chatter, unverifiable, with almost any conceivable report of that type you can imagine -- that he's alive, that he's not alive, that somebody saw him here, and no, that was his double, that -- that --

Q: No authorities --

Rumsfeld: Well, no. You don't -- I do not personally have -- I've not personally seen enough intelligence from reliable sources -- and not single-source conclusions, but multiple sources -- that are reliable, that would enable me to walk up and say that I have conviction that he's dead. I also lack conviction that he's alive.

I promise you I'm not keeping anything from you. If I had conviction, I would say so, and I don't. And I see a lot of information.

Thank you.

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