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# News Transcript

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**Presenter:** Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld

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## Secretary Rumsfeld Interview with the Associated Press

(Interview with Thelma LeBrecht, AP Radio, and Bob Burns, AP Wire – All for APTN)

Voice: Okay, Mr. Secretary I think we're.

Rumsfeld: Let me get myself organized here.

Q: Now in general terms now, looking at Iraq. What do you see that is the situation there now in Iraq? What do you see in terms of getting any nearer to formally declaring an end of the war? Sum up the situation now.

Rumsfeld: Well, people are still being killed and there's still paramilitary; generally in civilian clothes, needless to say, that are attacking our forces and coalition forces. So clearly the conflict is not completely over. There are pockets of resistance there. I think it's reasonable to expect that that will continue for a period of time.

On the other hand a large portion of the country, one could characterize as being in a stabilization or security stabilization period. Which is good. One of the really encouraging things is that, everyday all across the country. Local citizens come up and say look, here is the old Ba'ath Party headquarters, come in here, there's a cache of weapons or they say, right down the street is where the fellow who worked for the intelligence service lived. Why don't you go see if he is there and pick him up.

There hasn't been a day that's gone by in the past week where we haven't picked up one or two of these relatively senior people. Everyone's talking about this deck of cards. 55, I don't know how they got 55 but, 52 but in fact we have a list of some 200. That original list was purposely kept low at the outset because we wanted to separate the worst people from the regime hoping that others would come forward, indeed that's happened. But our actual list is much larger than the 55 and we keep picking people up everyday. Mostly sometimes it's at a checkpoint, trying to get into Syria, sometimes it's

scooped with a group of people. But in at least half the cases it's because somebody points them out and say, look down the street there's somebody you ought to want to talk to and that's a very encouraging thing.

Q: Could you describe your approach, the Administrations approach to getting from where you are now to having an actual government in place and having some staged national elections based on what you see today?

Rumsfeld: Oh I can. What we want to do is to first assure that there's a relatively permissive environment, a secure environment. And indeed every indication is that in large portions of the country, that's the case today. And increasingly a number of humanitarian people who are only allowed to do emergency situations are saying well we are leaving because there was not an emergency. The water problems been fixed, the food is adequate and the like, but we need to continue that process. First of saying that everything is secure and then saying that the basic needs are met, food, water. And then the next step is to see that the Iraqi people begin to be involved in their communities and in the development of a national government. And the way that's happening is there, in a number of places there's joint patrols taking place for security. And there's Iraqi's working with American and British military forces. In some cases they are actually forming town councils and beginning that process.

I guess it was Jefferson who said you don't go from despotism to freedom on a feather bed, and anyone who thinks it's easy is wrong. It is hard, and we saw that in Eastern Europe, we saw that the bumps, in what's left of the, the remnants, the Republics from the former Soviet Union and we know that. It isn't easy so we just have to take a little time and it's coming along well.

Q: I don't know if whether you could actually knit that together across the entire country and be, foresee national elections. Is that a goal?

Rumsfeld: I think there will be a, the beginning of an interim authority soon. I don't know quite what soon means but they are working on it, they are talking to people about how that would work, they are having a beginnings of these meeting around the country. As you realize there's some portion of the country have only been free of Saddam Hussein for the last week. So it's a little early to be impatient about it. So I can't be impatient, although the natural thing is to be impatient about it. You want the Iraqi's to govern themselves.

The next step of course would be to actually to form an interim authority of some kind and then begin having some Iraqi's take over some of the ministries that are not sensitive. Like we they wouldn't have defense or intelligence or that type of thing but certainly there are ministries that the Iraqi's can begin to take over and the interim authority could manage that and then the next step would be to have that interim authority develop a process so that a constitution can be drafted. And so that a method of selecting the next form of government that would follow the interim authority.

And that's, people are all talking about that, thinking about it and working with people there and here

on that subject.

Q: What are your concerns about when you are working towards that interim authority to have other people in the country (Inaudible.) the Iranian supported Shiite, the people that have moved in. Do you have concerns about that? And do you have any concerns about maybe Iraq might choose to have a Theocracy? Could the United States accept that?

Rumsfeld: Well, I guess you get into the question, well what do you mean by a Theocracy precisely. So you get into a definitional issue. I think the important thing to think of is. Take Afghanistan. It is enormously unhelpful if a Taliban from outside the country try to influence Afghanistan. It's unhelpful if the Iranian's try to subvert what's going on in Afghanistan.

We wouldn't like it if our neighbors were trying to influence what's happening inside our country. So what you want to try to do is to have external influences muted or eliminated to the extent possible. The Iraqi people I think over time will not want influence from Iran in their country. They won't want influence from Syria in their country. Now there will be some people who will. There are Ba'ath party members who would like to have influence from the Ba'ath party in Syria. There will be some people who may be pro-Iranian who would like that but the broad center of gravity in that country is not going to want their neighbors to be running their country.

Q: May I follow up on an Afghanistan --

Rumsfeld: You know what I would like to have.

Q: Would you like to elaborate on that? I didn't mean it in a --

Rumsfeld: Well I think that you asked how do we feel about it. We feel that that's not a good idea and the neighboring countries ought not to try an influence the outcome of the situation there. Over time the Iraqi's are going to figure out a way to manage their future and it will be consistent with the principles that we set out. A single country, a country that doesn't have weapons of mass destruction, doesn't threaten its neighbors and is respectful of the rights of minorities and religious diversity in the country.

And there'll be some sort of a representative government that will evolve and a non-dictatorial, a non-repressive government. And if you are suggesting how would we feel about an Iranian type government, with a few clerics running everything in the country. The answer is, that ain't gonna happen, I just don't see how that's going to happen.

Q: May I follow-up on Afghanistan? You mentioned that. I wondered if you could sort of sum up the latest of your thoughts on Afghanistan? And do you think Afghanistan sets the precedent for Iraq that you should measure the presence of the military in Iraq in terms of years not months? Just using Afghanistan as a precedent.

Rumsfeld: No. It isn't a precedent. It is a different country, it has different history it's got a different make-up it's got different neighbors and it is poor, and it's a crossroad country. Iraq has got a totally different history. It's got considerable wealth it has not had decades of civil war, conflict. It's had a war with Iran. But, it is much more like an Eastern European country in the sense that it has been a repressive dictator that have been taking the money for palaces and for weapons and not putting it into infrastructure.

Have you ever went into one of the Eastern Europe countries, the capital Lithuania or Poland or Czechoslovakia, you could see that during the communist period that they didn't care about the environment they didn't care about rebuilding the infrastructure and maintaining it in the proper way. It looks old and tattered and just not, the walk wasn't brisk if you follow me. You look in the countries shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Soviet Union, they look down on their luck and that's kind of where Iraq is. Iraq has been treated badly by this regime. It's a vicious brutal regime it's fortunate that it's gone.

Q: I would like to take you to a subject that you addressed earlier this week, which was the question of whether there's planning on the way in the Pentagon to establish a long-term military relationship with the government that does emerge in Iraq that might allow access for U.S. forces in the future?

Rumsfeld: Well, you know. Is there any planning going on in the Pentagon? Is somebody thinking about something like that? I don't doubt it for a minute. But we are looking at our footprint all over the globe as I have indicated. We are looking at it in Asia we are looking at it in Europe, which General Jones has announced. We are looking at it in the Middle East, in fact, we've just changed our footprint to some extent because we announced the end of operation of southern watch and northern. It was the end of a period and that changes that. Those forces leave. My guess is that in the case of Iraq you couldn't even begin to think about that until there was an interim government, that a final government that would be in a position to make those kind of arrangements.

Second, and I don't anticipate that will be the case. Second, certainly and not at the senior level there's no one planning anything like that. And third, my guess is with the absence of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq. The need for U.S. presence in the region would diminish rather than increase. And forth, there's an awful lot of countries in the region where a lot of money has been spent, in neighboring countries where we have excellent facilities, excellent cooperation and it's not as though we need additional places out there.

Q: You mentioned some of those newer more modern facilities like in Qatar for example perhaps. If you were to reduce in general terms in that region, would the newer more modern facilities be the ones where you would stay or prefer to stay?

Rumsfeld: There are several things one takes into account. One is cost as I mentioned. You certainly prefer to be someplace where you have some costs and don't have to start all over again, investing simply to be respectful of the American taxpayers dollars. A second thing is. You want to be

someplace that people want you. It is so much more hospitable for the men and women in uniform, who God bless them, volunteer to serve and then there put over on some base overseas. It's wonderful if they are in someplace where the people and government are happy to have them, they want them there and so we don't want to be places that we are not wanted. We simply don't so that's another factor. Another factor is simply geography and the geo-strategic circumstance of a location. A third is, forth is the question of access in and out. For example, we saw a situation recently for example in the build up for Iraq where we weren't allowed to cross Austria by rail. That's harmful, that's unhelpful and we much prefer to be in place where we not only are wanted in the country we are in, but the access in and out of it by air or by sea or land is readily facilitated rather than habited and made more difficult and expensive. So it's a whole host of factors that we are considering. But it would be a mistake to suggest that we have plans to put permanent bases, thinking at the senior level, to put permanent bases in Iraq because that's just not the case.

Q: Do you anticipate an actual relationship, military and military and military and a government relationship with them?

Rumsfeld: I don't anticipate or not anticipate. It seems to me that one would hope that Iraq would not invest in a military, in a way that distracted from the needs of the Iraqi people. They have a neighbor that they've been at war with. Iran. And, so there is that issue and the question is, what is best for Iraq and what do the Iraqi people and the Iraqi government that eventually all decides is in their best interest. It may be that they would like to have a security relationship with other countries that would enable them to not make those massive investments and still feel that they were in a relatively secure situation, relative to their neighbors. It may be that that's not the case and it's all so far in the future that it's not something.

Take for example, our relationship with Japan. It has been a wonderful thing for Japan and for us and it's been 50 years and it's been a healthy thing. And the nuclear umbrella that we have provided in that part of the world has enabled Japan to flourish and function without having to develop nuclear weapons to compete in the nuclear stage over the years and that's been a good thing for Japan, it's been a good thing for us. How it will shake out as we go forward, for example, from a conventional standpoint in that region is just to far away to even begin to imagine.

Q: Let me follow-up on that point, on mentioning Korea for instance. In terms of restructuring U.S. forces in that region, do you foresee that you might be able to withdraw some U.S. troops from that region?

Rumsfeld: I wouldn't want to announce it, there's no question that we have a new commander there, Gen. LaPorte and I have had discussions with the members of the South Korean government and as you may recall the new President in South Korea, Republic of Korea announced that he wanted to rebalance that relationship when he was running for office. And I've said publicly that I thought that I thought that was a good idea it's an appropriate time for us to review that and so we will be reviewing. How it will shake out I think remains to be seen. But it will end up, I'm certain that it will end up in a way that reflects that strength of the U.S. Republic of Korea relationship. It will reflect the realities of

the threat that North Korea poses to South Korea and our interest in not having more but our interest in having a health deterrent that dissuades and deters conflicts.

Q: I wonder if I can ask another North Korea question which is what is your understanding at this point of whether they have actually begun their reprocessing of the spent fuel rods that have been in the news lately? In the band, is it your assessment based on what you have seen and heard for the past several months that the North Koreans are hell bent on actually becoming serial producers of nuclear materials or is it strictly a bargaining?

Rumsfeld: I think I am going to leave the subject to North Korea off to the side. It is a, there are people over there right now negotiating, I shouldn't say negotiating, meeting. Assistant Secretary of State is. And they are having discussions with, thanks to the cooperation of the People's Republic of China. I'm seeing the intelligence of the reporting back on it but it isn't for me to be injecting myself into that. I think that over time the President is interested in what's taking place there, we have an interest as to the people of the Republic of China in a non-nuclear peninsula. Most countries agreed to that sometime back. That's our preference, and needless to say we continue to be imposed to proliferation of ballistic missiles and technologies that relate to weapons of mass destruction.

Q: Let me take you to going back to Iraq for just a second. Is there anything new on missing Americans in Iraq, including Scott Spiecher?

Rumsfeld: Not that I've heard.

Q: And have you heard anything about SS initials. I heard a report that there might something like that.

Rumsfeld: I've seen it in the press. I have not seen anything beyond that.

Q: What about anything new? You mentioned the capture of top Iraqi leaders. Anything more that you've gotten on that or

Rumsfeld: There are, there are people that have been picked up in the last 24 hours and my guess is that after their identities are fully verified why that information will undoubtedly be made public. Sometimes they voluntarily walk up and say look, I'm on your list and I want to get some credit for turning myself in. Some cases, someone down the street says, go look over in that house and in some cases they are just scooped up in a random effort but we are gathering them in everyday.

Q: Secretary you commented of course almost daily, quite frequently anyway on the progress in Iraq since this thing began. As you look back on it, does anything stick out in your mind as a so-called turning point or tipping point where victory became...

Rumsfeld: I think adding Gen. Tom Franks to be the Combatant Commander was the turning point. He's just done a superb job, absolutely superb. He's demonstrated the kind of leadership that, it's

solid it thoughtful, it was enormously innovative and highly successful. So this country is fortunate to have people like that, spend their whole lives preparing for something like this and then when the country is faced with that kind of problem, they are there. We are so fortunate as a country to have such solid, talented people dedicate 20, 30, 40 years of their lives to the armed services in the United States.

Q: The case of Gen. Franks I guess that decision actually was made well before the war because his, he was asked to stay on an extra year. Was that with Iraq in mind?

Rumsfeld: No, no. It's just you come in and he's, the Combatant Commanders are there and you make judgment as to where people ought to be or are they best there or somewhere else and I made a judgment that he was absolutely first rate, recommended him to the President for extension and thank the goodness we did.

Q: Let me ask you also that the search for weapons of mass destructions in Iraq, so far what's your assessment on that and does the American public need to have this smoking gun in order to justify the war?

Rumsfeld: Oh goodness. I can't speak for the American public. There's no question but that the intelligence that United States and other countries have had over a long period of time has been that they have chemical and biological weapons and that they had developed a great deal of skill at hiding them and functioning in an inspections environment. They were very use to having the U.N. in there, they U.N. could go anywhere they wanted almost and they were clever enough that they could always be one step ahead of them. And the people now are starting to report what they did, these scientist that we captured, they were not allowed not to talk at all and then as the rift in the United Nations became more apparent they didn't talk at all, as the rift became less apparent and Saddam Hussein became worried that something might happen, he behaved differently and the scientist in some cases were allowed to talk on with a minder, and in other cases, they were allow to talk with tape recording on, some places they were only allowed to talk in a room that they knew was wired by the Iraqi government. So at this, all of this starting to come out now so they were very good at functioning there, but there's no question but that our folks now that they have a large portion of the country that's permissive, we can actually move around and function.

They'll be beginning to exploit those sites and try to find where they are. My personal view is they're going to find it only when the find people who will say precisely where things were.

Q: And what would you say to the weapons inspectors, in fact, Hans Blix said recently that the U.S. side of demonstration of this was pathetic in terms of finding

Rumsfeld: The U.S. what?

Q: That in terms of the record of finding weapons of mass destruction in Iraq was pathetic and he thought the weapons inspectors should

Rumsfeld: Is it that his record or, was pathetic or U.N.'s record?

Q: The U.S. presentation, of the case that there are weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

Rumsfeld: I haven't read what he said.

Q: What is your thought about allowing U.N. weapons inspectors inside Iraq to help in the search?

Rumsfeld: Oh that's the matter for Department of State and Treasurer to figure out. There are one's who decide what the U.N. ought to do and not ought to do.

Q: Along the same lines what about spud missiles. There was an assessment I believe before the war that the Iraqi's

Rumsfeld: There might be a handful left over that hadn't been destroyed and that was a speculation. We have not found whether or not that is a correct conclusion in the intelligence community.

Q: So based on the work that's been done in the west where there was believed they would be most likely (Inaudible.).

Rumsfeld: The west was where the baskets were at where could reach neighboring countries but to my knowledge that was never where they were suppose to have been kept. I just don't know where they were supposed to have been kept.

Q: And in one final search for Saddam Hussein, do you think that the Iraqi people will need to have some idea of his fate for them to feel secure?

Rumsfeld: No, I think that, I think they'll, he's not. His regime isn't there, they are not running that country and that's what was needed. We will figure out what happened to him in some point but, I don't know if he is alive or dead but the, you know a little time passes and people see that the Ba'ath parties have pretty much been dealt with and that those remnants are hunted down and being pressured and aren't able to function very effectively and that the SSO and the fedayeen Saddam crowds are pretty well dissipated, killed or captured. I think then they'll begin to understand that it's their country and not Saddam Hussein's country.

Q: Will Gen. Franks or you or the President actually make an official declaration that hostilities have ended? Is there a plan for moving completely into the next phase?

Rumsfeld: What happens is, you go from a period of preparation and then you end up with a period of conflict and then you end up with a period of stabilization and then at some point that end. How that will happen in the case of Afghanistan for example and Iraq, it is unclear exactly how that happens and partly it depends on rapidly the government is able to cease control of the country and assure



security for that country on its own. In the case of Afghanistan we've moved to the point where we're almost, the entire country is almost in a stabilization mode. There are still problems along the border of Pakistan and there are periodic firefights and disorder but for the most part we are in the process of getting very close to a stabilization mode. And at what point, will for example the Karzai government, the Afghan government have a sufficient a sufficiently large Afghan national army and have sufficiently healthy relationships with all the elements of the country that you can say that there have been an official, technical, legal, cessation of any hostilities. I don't know when that might occur and I certainly couldn't predict with something that's as recent as Iraq.

Q: So it's not eminent, it's not in the near term in Iraq?

Rumsfeld: I wouldn't think so. We had Ba'ath people killed there this week.

Q: But there is a distinction between major combat operations and

Rumsfeld: Well, there is no question about that but then in each in those countries we moved from the period of major combat operations to a period of pockets of resistance. That's true but that doesn't mean that I would say that there is a technical issue that is wrapped around the phrase sensation of hostilities that I think affect when one wants to do that.

Q: Does that have to do with the handling of prisoners of war?

Rumsfeld: I don't think so. I don't know it may.

Q: Let me ask you about Afghanistan because do you think

Rumsfeld: I think there a number of things and that may very well be one of them. Just to finish that thought, we had, I don't know at the peak maybe 7,000 plus enemy prisoners of war in Iraq and we have been triaging, to use the word, we have been going in there trying to find people that were simply good soldiers, they were part of a unit that surrendered or they were scooped up and they are not Ba'ath party members, they are not special intelligence people, they are not causing anyone any trouble they are going to very likely just go home and we have been letting them off. We have been in the process of systematically moving them out, we want to have as few possible and so they are going through a vetting process right now. The number is staying fairly close to about 7,000 and the reason it is, is because as we move a few hundred out, I think we have moved out over 1100 already but, additional ones come in and as they go around town and some fedayeen Saddam shoot at them and they scoop up 20 or 30 of these folks and they then stick them in the camp that we maintain and so the numbers stayed about level but it's actually different people, there is a lot going out everyday and some coming in.

Q: On Afghanistan, what do you see as the, hurting the al Qaeda? It would appear that there's have been a major accomplishment in weakening the al Qaeda? What's your assessment?

Rumsfeld: Oh goodness. I don't know that I'm the best one to assess it, but there's no question but that the intelligence community broadly feels that al Qaeda has been significantly weakened, the absence of Afghanistan as a training area, the pressure that the Pakistan government is putting on the al Qaeda in Pakistan. The work that the Karzai government and Gen. McNeil and the international security systems force and the coalition partners in that country are doing. All the arrest that are being made around the world that's in the thousands now, people who have been sharing intelligence and find cells and picking them up and interrogating them. All of that has made their lives more difficult, it makes it more difficult to raise money. People who want to give money to al Qaeda are much more careful today because they don't want their fingerprints on it. It is more difficult for the al Qaeda to move money they have to do it in small amounts. It's more difficult for them to communicate with each other. Life is just tougher for them it's tougher to recruit it's tougher to retain. Now does that mean that the threat's gone away? No, does it mean that we've seen the end of terrorist attacks? No, we'll see more but a lot of good progress has been made.

Q: Let me ask you one question about, now that you have two wars underneath your belt and you've had, there have been recent stories simultaneously in the New York Times and the Washington Post talking about your new stature. I wanted to get your reaction in terms of

Rumsfeld: Don't believe it. That and a buck fifty get you a ride on the subway.

Q: Do you think that it does give you perhaps a little bit of leverage in terms of how the United States should think about using its military?

Rumsfeld: No. I don't. I think that the value of ideas is what ought to be persuasive and either the, one can argue persuasively and rooted in history and in fact and logic or you can't. We have wonderful team of people. I read all this stuff about Secretary Powell this and that. He is a talented, able person, who is a good friend of mine and we work very closely together and the President and the Vice President and the national security team I think are doing a good job.

Q: In terms of if you were to use the military more, for in Iraq the military was used for countering a perceived threat. I wondered if you think, and that was the first, I wondered if you think it now having established that pattern that might make it easier to argue that case?

Rumsfeld: Oh I wouldn't think so, I mean beauty is in the eye of the beholder and I think that if someone could look at Iraq and say that was an enforcement of U.N. resolutions, how many was it 13, 14, 15, 16, and at some point someone had to, the coalition had to see that those resolutions were enforced. They were being violated and you can look at it that way. There have been preemptive acts by governments throughout history and no one I think is perfectly comfortable with that. On the other hand it isn't are comfortable, it's what the lesser of evils and there is no question about that, it was preemptive of us to go into Afghanistan. Afghanistan didn't do anything the al Qaeda did. And it's true they were housing him but by golly we went in and stopped the al Qaeda from functioning in Afghanistan and we stopped the Taliban government from harboring terrorist and that was a preemptive act. Call it what you want but we did it to protect the American people and thank

goodness we did. There are a lot of Americans who are alive today that might not been alive had we not gone into Afghanistan.

Q: And the next question would be. If you obviously, if the United States sees a perceived threat then there would be no question of, if the threat is there, that the correct step would be to take military action?

Rumsfeld: Those are tough calls and you don't do it easily. War is your last choice, you try economic sanctions you try diplomacy you try persuasion you will do a whole lot of things but if you obviously. In the case of Afghanistan the President of the United States looked at what was taking place and there was a country that was complicit in helping to organize and train and fund terrorist that were killing and that case, September 11, 3,000 innocent men, women and children, people every country in the world, of every religion and it was a terrible deed, therefore the President made a judgment that we should act and fortunately we did and fortunately it was swift and with, not against the Afghan people, not against the religion but against terrorist, against terrorism.

Voice: Thank you Mr. Secretary for your time.

Voice: Thank you very much.

Rumsfeld: Thank you.

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