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Presenter: Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld

 Wednesday, June 18, 2003 - 2:40 p.m.
 EDT

Secretary Rumsfeld Media Availability with Jay Garner

(Also participating is Jay Garner, Former Director, Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance. Photos of today's briefing are available at <http://www.defenselink.mil/photos/Jun2003/030618-D-9880W-111.html> and <http://www.defenselink.mil/photos/Jun2003/030618-D-9880W-100.html>.)

Rumsfeld: As you may have noticed, Jay Garner -- General Jay Garner is in town and has been good enough to join me here and make a statement and respond to some questions. Before he does, let me just say a few things about him.

I do want to thank Jay for the absolutely superb job that he has done in laying the foundation for the Iraqi people to begin this process of rebuilding from the rubble of decades of Saddam Hussein's tyranny and to put themselves on a path towards democratic self-government. Our plan, when we first met -- I don't know if it was late last year or early this year -- was to have Jay put together an element that could eventually go forward and have it ready so that when the conflict permitted and it was wound down sufficiently, it could be moved into the country. He did that; he did it exceedingly well and, once again, demonstrated his superb leadership capabilities.

There was no way to know how long or how short the conflict would be with certain knowledge. So, Jay left -- first, organized here, then went to Kuwait. And then, when the situation improved sufficiently, moved his team into the country. His task was to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid and basic services; to coordinate relief and reconstruction efforts among U.S., coalition and nongovernmental agencies and organizations; to begin working with Iraqi leaders to help them start the process of building a free society.

He accomplished these tasks exceedingly well. Within days of his arrival, the power was restored

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in many areas and work began to initiate the power in the rest of the country. Today, the water system, I'm told, Jay, is operating at about 80 percent of prewar level, with some parts of the country reporting more and better water, cleaner water, than existed prior to the conflict. Within weeks, his team had recalled Iraqi civil servants to work and began paying salaries and pensions from seized Hussein regime funds to some -- I guess it's up to close to 2 million people now, isn't it?

Garner: Yes, sir.

Rumsfeld: In the north and south, electric service is better than it's been in 12 years. Basra has power 24 hours a day, I'm told; Baghdad is now averaging something like 18, 19 or 20 hours a day. Gas lines for cars that mark the first weeks of after-liberation are disappearing, and production and importation of gasoline continues at approximately 14 million liters a day.

There has not been a major health crisis. There is not a humanitarian crisis in the country. All of the nongovernmental experts who have gone in have indicated that that's the case. Doctors and nurses have gone back to work. Twelve public hospitals in Baghdad are functioning and receiving power. Iraqi children are returning to schools. Emergency payments have been made in the Ministry of Education, as well as to some 20,000 teachers in Baghdad alone.

The de-Ba'athification process is underway. And hundreds of individuals have been removed from their positions.

Security throughout the country is indicated here. Green is what's characterized as permissive. That's not to say perfect, but it's permissive. The yellow is semi-permissive and the red area in Baghdad and then in the area north towards Tikrit is considered not permissive or semi-permissive. There are now some 8,000 police officers back at work and 2,000 on patrol. And in those pockets, you'll recall that when President Bush indicated that the major military activities had ended, we said very explicitly that that did not mean that the -- that was the end of kinetics; that there would continue to have to be significant efforts to root out the remnants of the regime. That's been going forward, and it's been going forward in recent days, particularly, in ways that have been quite helpful.

We had a National Security Council meeting today with General Abizaid on a secure video, and Ambassador Bremer on the secure video. And the president and the Security Council received a report. And there's no question but that in those regions where pockets of dead-enders are trying to reconstitute, General Franks and his team are rooting them out.

In short, the coalition is making good progress. It was made possible by the excellent military plan of General Franks and by the terrific leadership of the stabilization effort by Mr. Jay Garner and his team. So I am deeply appreciative to him and to the wonderful group of people that he assembled here -- gosh, it's been what, six months ago now?

Garner: Six months ago, yes, sir.

Rumsfeld: And Jay is going to be -- he's back, and he's going to be going over to meet with the president and give him a final report, and I wanted to bring him down here to say a few words.

Jay?

Garner: Thank you, sir.

Rumsfeld: Thank you.

Garner: Mr. Secretary, the only thing I'd say is I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for the opportunity to work with you again, and for the opportunity to serve the nation, serve the president. Anytime you can do anything to make people free, it's a great feeling, a great thing to do.

To all of you, I'd like to just say one thing. There are problems in Iraq and there will be problems in Iraq for a while. There's always problems when you've been brutalized for 30 years and you take people out of absolute darkness and put them in the sunshine, it takes a while for them to get their feet.

But I left Iraq around 18 days ago, and the night before I left, I went on a joint foot patrol with the Baghdad police and the cavalry regiment, a squadron of the cavalry regiment. And I went through alleys, and I went down streets, and we put up road blocks, and we had a mounted patrol and a dismounted patrol. And we started at 8:00 that night and we ended at 1:30. And everywhere I went, up until curfew at 11:00, everywhere I went, the streets were teeming with people. But if you looked at that, what you recognize is those people were families, and they had their children with them and they were happy, and they talked -- they stopped me and they talked to me. And my impression of that is you don't take your children out on the streets unless you feel somewhat comfortable about the situation you're in.

The second thing I'd tell you is in over 70 meetings I had with Iraqis out in the markets, with clerics, with garbage workers, with health officials, with educators, et cetera, they complained about electricity, they complained about water, they complained about all the things you and I would complain about. But at the end of every one of those meetings, I always got a thumbs up, and it was "thank you," and "thank Mr. Bush for taking Saddam Hussein away and making us free."

So I think there's more goodness, far more goodness than there is badness, and the glass absolutely is half full. So --

Rumsfeld: Thank you.

Charlie.

Q: Mr. Secretary, is there any sign in this department of any central control over these dead-enders, as you call them, who have now killed -- well, 42 American troops have now died since the president declared major hostilities at an end. Any sign of --

Rumsfeld: The 42 died by hostility, hostile action --

Q: No. Forty-two have died, some of those --

Rumsfeld: Right. Some by hostile action.

Q: -- some of those by -- some of those by hostile action.

Rumsfeld: Okay. I just wanted to make sure that people didn't go away with the wrong impression.

Q: Is there any sign that there's any central control, or growing central control over these people? And what do you think the tolerance of Americans is for these continuing deaths of U.S. troops?

Rumsfeld: Well, no one can read or hear or learn about the death of an American soldier, sailor, Marine, Coast Guardsman, airman without feeling a deep sorrow that a person who volunteered their service to the country and stepped up to serve their country was killed defending what they believed in and defending our freedom. So I'm sure that's what the American people feel.

The -- I think the American people have a very good center of gravity. And I wouldn't sell them short, if I were you. I think you'll find that they -- they're seeing the mass graves that exist in that country, they are getting a good sense of the nature of that regime, and the numbers of -- hundreds and thousands of people that were killed by that regime. And I believe that they feel that this is a worthwhile effort on our part, that it is a -- something that is -- that reflects the American spirit, and they recognize the difficulty of the task.

The -- what happened, basically, was the war was fought in this area, and to some extent up there, but not in this area. And that area collapsed. And those people disappeared. So there were too few of the Ba'athists and the Saddam Hussein enforcers that were captured or killed in that area. And that means that that portion of the conflict continues. And that's understandable. And it will end. We will -- General Franks and his team will root out the remainder of those people to the extent that it can be done. And I think the American people, and certainly the president and I, recognize that that'll take some time, and we think it's important that it be done.

Q: Do you see any sign that this resistance is well or centrally organized, or is it --

Rumsfeld: There's a little debate on that. There's no -- I don't know anyone who is persuaded and has a real strong conviction that there is anything approximating a national or a regional organization that is energizing and motivating these attacks. The -- there's undoubtedly in small elements of 10, 12, 15, 20, some organization among 20 people. But if you're thinking about large military formations or some sort of a network organizing something, I have not seen any intelligence to that effect.

Have you, Jay?

Garner: No, sir. I don't think you see anything that appears in any way like a campaign plan -- mostly localized.

Q: Mr. Secretary --

Rumsfeld: Look, you got remember that if Washington D.C. were size of Baghdad, we would be having something like 215 murders a month. And it is -- there's going to be violence in a big city. It's five and a half million people. For the most part, it's in that area I described. That's where the active -- and it tends not to be, at this stage, random killings. It's not the kind of rioting you saw on television last night in Michigan, or that type of thing. What you're seeing instead is what we believe is purposeful attacks against coalition forces as opposed to simply crime and that type of thing.

Q: Mr. Secretary? CENTCOM is now confirming that General Abid Mahmud, Saddam Hussein's presidential secretary, is now in custody. Can you provide any more details about how he was apprehended, and perhaps your perception of how important that is.

Rumsfeld: I could, but I won't. It's not useful.

Q: How about how important it is?

Rumsfeld: It's not useful to respond to either of those questions.

Q: Mr. Secretary --

Q: Okay, if I can follow up and try to get one in --

Rumsfeld: Follow-up? What do you mean, you struck out twice. (Laughter.)

Q: Yeah, I know -- (inaudible due to laughter) -- a question gets an answer. Can I ask both of you, do you believe at all that you overestimated the amount of support that you'd get from the Iraqi people before the war after they were liberated from Saddam Hussein?

Rumsfeld: Jay?

Garner: I don't think we did. And if -- I'll go back to what I just said previously. I think the overwhelming majority of the Iraqi people are happy to see us there. In fact, if you get out and in masses talk to them, at the end of the discussion, they'll all tell you that. Sure, you've got -- you've still got some problems there, but you take the area we're talking about, which was Ba'athist-centric, and you couple that with the fact that many criminals were released in March, you still have a lot of hangers-on that have to be policed up. And I think that's what they're doing now. And I think by and large they're doing a good job of it.

Q: Mr. Secretary, could I ask you and the general a question? You can both chime in, if you will. There are some members of the British House of Commons who are saying that the United States should plea bargain with some of those 33 of the 55 now in our custody, to perhaps even go so far as to give them a new identity and a new way of life if they would turn over or give any really concrete information as to the whereabouts of Saddam Hussein, his sons and weapons of mass destruction. And a couple of these members of the House of Commons claimed that they're

getting stonewalled here in the United States, that the United States is against it.

From your perspective, General, being over there, do you see any possibility of plea bargaining with these people to get them to talk?

Garner: Well, I hadn't thought about that, but I don't -- about being stonewalled, I don't know anything about that. I'm not sure I would want to plea bargain with that type of person. And I would think a long time before I did that, I believe.

Q: Mr. Secretary, do you -- (off mike)?

Rumsfeld: Sure. We've thought about it a good deal. And it is a perfectly reasonable proposal that those individuals are making, and the lawyers have been considering it. And the question is, what do you get for what you give? And any time you enter into that process, with a bargain, you're giving up something in terms of what might be merited, and you're gaining something, or else you wouldn't be engaging in the process. And those judgments are the kinds of things that the Justice department and the Central Intelligence Agency will make with respect to the people. In other words, what do we think we can get by way of information or validation or assistance in exchange for what we'd have to give up? Those are the calculations.

Q: So it's still possible; it's not dead.

Rumsfeld: Oh, and there's -- first of all, there is no stonewalling going on. I don't have any idea who said what you said they said, or even if they said what you said they said, although I'm quite sure you think they said what you said they said. (Laughter.)

Q: (Inaudible.)

Rumsfeld: Yes, I -- (inaudible word). (Laughter.) But they could be mistaken. They could be seeing not stonewalling at all but simply the normal speed of the bureaucracy at work.

Q: Mr. Secretary, how significant --

Q: Mr. Secretary?

Rumsfeld: Yes, Barbara?

Q: I wanted to ask you about a couple of things you've recently said, just to clarify. I think when you were on your trip to Europe you said that -- I think the word you used was "ridiculous," if I remember correctly, that the intelligence about weapons of mass destruction had been overplayed or exaggerated by the administration, that that simply had not happened. I was curious how you have come to that conclusion and how you know that for a certainty. In other words, have you reviewed it, have you asked your senior staff for a review? Have you personally looked into the matter and been totally satisfied?

And the other thing I wanted to ask you to clarify, if I might --

Rumsfeld: Let's do one at a time.

Q: Okay.

Rumsfeld: I don't recall saying that, but I may very well have. The -- I have not reviewed the matter. I do know that the intelligence has been what it has been for a decade and more, and it has gotten richer every year -- fuller, more robust. It is intelligence that the U.S. had, that the U.K. had. It is intelligence that was not disputed in the U.N. If you'll recall, the issue wasn't whether or not the intelligence was correct by the other countries, the only issue was whether it was appropriate to wait a bit longer to allow inspections to work.

What you have to appreciate is that they learned to live in an inspections environment in that country; that is to say to be able to still function and have inspectors there in the country. And they had a very long period to hide, or do whatever it is they wanted to do with those capabilities.

My personal view is that their intelligence has been, I'm sure, imperfect, but good. In other words, I think the intelligence was correct in general, and that you always will find out precisely what it was once you get on the ground and have a chance to talk to people and explore it, and I think that will happen.

Jay, what do you think about this? You've seen what's been going on.

Garner: Well, he used them pretty robustly 20 years ago against the Iranians. He used them very robustly against the Kurds. In fact, when I was in the north last time, a Kurdish child gave me a picture she had painted of Kurds who were dead, having been gassed by Saddam Hussein.

As our troops went forward to Baghdad, I think you found that his army was well provided with chemical and biological equipment, which indicates to me that he had that and probably intended to use it, if he had been able to. He had 12 years to hide it; he was very skillful at doing that.

But to me, that's not the issue. I mean, if you had been with me three weeks ago in the killing fields near Babylon, I stood there with the governor of Babel and watched them unearth bodies. And there were over -- probably nearly 4,000 in that one particular grave. And many of them were no longer than this - children. And thousands of people killed; many of them, buried alive. That, in itself -- just that one thing in itself -- was enough to go in there and remove that dictator. And if you had been with me three weeks ago, you'd believe the same thing today.

Q: Mr. Secretary, could I ask my other clarification?

Rumsfeld: Why don't we move around a little bit and -- yes?

Q: To follow up on your opening comments about this small area of resistance, we've seen reports out of Iraq about non-Iraqis, or at least some evidence --

Rumsfeld: (Off mike) -- That's valid. The people we're scooping up, in many cases, are not Iraqis.

Q: Well, can you talk a little bit about that? You know, there's some concern that the longer this lasts, that Iraq could become a recruiting tool for Muslim militants in that part of the world, kind of along the lines, although not as big, as Afghanistan in the eighties. Are you concerned about that? And can you talk a little bit about what you've seen and what you think it means? Where are they coming from? Are they organized?

Rumsfeld: As I say, we've commented on the organization issue. We don't see any large-scale --

Q: The effort to send them to Iraq -- (off mike).

Rumsfeld: Oh! I don't know. We know that there were bus loads coming in with money and recruiting posters during the conflict, and we stopped the buses to the extent we found them. The people that are getting scooped up now, there's some Syrians in the latest net that was cast. And I'm sure there are people -- either they were in there or they're still coming in from neighboring countries. And it is something that's obviously unhelpful.

I think the idea that -- of cause and effect is a stretch. We were attacked on September 11th without any cause. And the attacks that took place in Morocco or the attacks that take place in other places -- to suggest that there's some remote event over here that's causing those things to happen, I think, ignores the history and the reality of what's taking place. There are terrorist networks and they're being supported, in some cases, by terrorist states. And they are bound and determined to kill innocent men, women and children. What will increase or decrease the flow of money or the flow of people, or increase or decrease the retention of those networks -- I'm sure there are multiple factors that affect it. But certainly freeing the Iraqi people isn't one of them.

Q: General Garner --

Q: Mr. Secretary, how big an effect are you hoping will have these series of raids and sweeps that have been going on in the last couple of days, Operation Desert Scorpion, in terms of abating the attacks upon Americans? We've been told that hundreds of individuals have rounded up piles of cash that apparently have been used to pay people -- do you think the effect of the last -- do you think we're going to see an effect from the last couple days?

Rumsfeld: Well -- (chuckles) --

Q: Unless -- (off mike) --

Rumsfeld: You have two choices. If you see puddling or pools of these people gathering through your intel, and then you've got a choice, how do you feel about that? Do you want a collection of terrorist who wish you ill to just sit there and puddle and go about their business, killing neighboring people, or not? And the -- if you -- then you don't do anything.

If you do do something, you go in and find them and capture them or kill them. And that's what's going on.

And it seems to me it's a no-brainer. It's a three-minute decision. The first two are for coffee.
(Laughter.)

Q: Well, I'm not asking why you did it. I'm just saying: Are you -- I'm asking if you're having -- do you think it's going to have success? And will that success --

Rumsfeld: Compared to the alternative? Compared to alternative, yes. Letting them just go about their -- willy-nilly go about their task of killing people is less preferable than what we're undertaking.

Q: Do you expect that we'll see fewer attacks in the future because of what you accomplished in the last few days?

Rumsfeld: There are so many factors that are going to determine that. It's going to be the flow from Iran and the flow from Syria of people. It's going to be the pace at which we are able to get an Iraqi face on an interim authority and they begin to see that their future is in that direction. It's going to be a function of how rapidly we're going to be able to continue to increase the police forces. Thanks to Jay and his team, we've got a lot of Iraqis involved in joint patrols today. It'll depend on a whole host of things whether or not the security situation will stay roughly what it is -- about like this -- for a period, or whether it'll start -- continue to get better. And it has been getting better, as Jay described.

Q: And wouldn't you at least concede that the capture of Saddam Hussein's top bodyguard was an important apprehension?

Rumsfeld: Didn't we try that one earlier?

Q: (Chuckles.)

Rumsfeld: Why should I answer yours if Bret's -- Bret asked it better than you did. (Laughter, cross talk.)

Q: Secretary?

Rumsfeld: Yes?

Q: My name is Nayyar Zaidi. I represent the Daily Jang in Pakistan. And if I may deviate a little bit from Iraq, what kind of a defense package or aid would you be discussing when General Musharraf comes here?

Rumsfeld: I am old-fashioned. I'm inclined to let the president talk to the president of Pakistan and --

Q: But you will be -- (off mike) -- president.

Rumsfeld: I will be. I have been.

Q: Yes.

Rumsfeld: I do.

Q: So is there anything in the works?

Rumsfeld: And what he'll do is he'll meet with President Musharraf in an appropriate location in the greater Washington area. And I will, probably in this building -- or maybe not. It's going to be at his location, I think.

Q: But would it be on the agenda -- defense? Some kind of a defense, besides economics?

Rumsfeld: They're certainly going to be talking about lots of things. And it's a good relationship and it's one that we feel is important. And my instinct is that it's appropriate to leave those things to -- that belong to the Department of State or the White House to the president or the secretary of State.

Q: General Garner?

Q: Mr. Secretary, the Canadian defense minister has said that he fears that perhaps Taliban or al Qaeda may actually be getting in a position to take over Afghanistan again. How do you feel about the security situation in Afghanistan?

Rumsfeld: Who said that?

Q: It was either the Canadian foreign minister or the defense minister said that recently.

Rumsfeld: Well, there's no question, we know that the al Qaeda and the Taliban would like to. It was a wonderful thing to have a whole country -- lots of training camps, and going out killing people willy-nilly. It's quite a thing for them.

We decided that wasn't a good idea. We stopped it, and we intend to keep it stopped.

Q: But what's your assessment of the situation right now? I mean, do you have the same --

Rumsfeld: It hasn't changed dramatically at all. You have a situation in that country where you have porous borders on the north, the east, the south and the west. You have people in Iran who have influence in the country on the western border. You have people in Pakistan along the Pak-Afghan border that are able to move back and forth across that border like it's not there at all. And these are in tribal areas that are very difficult for the Pakistan government to monitor and control and deal with. They are doing a good job and have been working hard at that. Our folks on the Afghan side have been doing a good job and working on the problem. And I haven't seen any evidence at all that suggests to me that the country's about to fall, if that's what you're suggesting he said. Is that --

Q: Yeah, that's essentially what he said, I mean, it's not verbatim, but it's close.

Rumsfeld: Yeah, I haven't seen evidence to that effect.

Q: Sir, I have a question about the Defense budget that was passed by the House a couple of weeks ago. There's a section in there that critics say somewhat run counter to the Pentagon's attempts to build coalitions and strengthen coalition fighting and peacekeeping in Iraq. It's a "buy America" provision that Chairman Duncan Hunter pushed successfully through the House. It seems to give the Pentagon less flexibility in terms of waiving what they buy from foreign companies versus U.S. companies, and expands the number of U.S. parts that have to be in major programs.

The U.K. Defense procurement minister criticized it yesterday at the Paris Air Show. Can you give your perspective on whether this is a helpful provision, or what are some of the problems with it?

Rumsfeld: I can't. What I can say is that we fashioned a budget, the president's budget, which we believe was a good budget. There were a number of things, a lot of things that were supported very helpfully in the House, a lot of things supported in the Senate. There were some things in both places that we would hope could be adjusted in conference. And we'll be working with the conferees very intensively over the coming period. And I'm sure that those kinds of issues that resulted in changes will be things that will be subject to discussion.

Q: In general, are provisions that strengthen --

Rumsfeld: I have answered -- I have answered as much as I can. Yeah.

Q: Okay, thanks.

Q: Mr. Secretary?

Rumsfeld: Yes.

Q: Would you say --

Rumsfeld: You've got Jay Garner here now. If I were you, I would ask him some questions. He's fresh. He's been down in Florida and took a few days off with his grandchildren. He's -- he's ready.

Q: Okay. Sorry, on WMD again, would you say like Robin Cook said yesterday, that in hindsight it was not correct to talk about the immediate threat by Saddam Hussein against the United States? The word being "immediate".

Rumsfeld: I didn't see what Mr. Cook said. And I really do -- am reluctant to comment on things, because then it gets juxtaposed with the words, and it was in a different context, and I don't find that useful.

Q: Would you say that Saddam posed an immediate threat --

Rumsfeld: What I would say is what we've said for a year, and what the president said to the country, what Secretary Powell said, and no more and no less.

Q: I have a question for the general --

Staff: Sir? Your presence across the river is requested a little bit early. So we should take one more question.

Rumsfeld: Ah! Hah! Last question for General Garner.

Q: General Garner, you have been at home for about two weeks now. Given that perspective of time and distance, what about Iraq surprised you?

Garner: Well, I don't think the complexities surprised me, but the magnitude of the complexities surprised me a little bit. And the -- the Iraqis are extremely skillful people. And they're great administrators. But the ability to pull them all together and work across the lines of religions and tribes and that type thing becomes fairly difficult. And I think -- you go back to what the secretary said, I think as we get further down the road and as Mr. Bremer gets further down the road -- and I think all the things he's doing are absolutely the right things -- and we begin to get Iraqi faces on that, I think the complexities of that will begin to be whittled away. But that's about it.

Q: So does the magnitude suggest that we didn't have enough going in and we --

Garner: No, I don't think so.

Q: How about a quickie, just as we leave? General, does it bother you working for Secretary Rumsfeld rather than Tommy Franks?

Garner: I thought I worked for both. And as I remember right, Tommy Franks worked for Secretary Rumsfeld. (Laughter.)

Q: Have a nice afternoon, gentlemen.

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