







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Saturday, September 6, 2003

Secretary Rumsfeld Press Availability in Iraq

(Also participating was Ambassador L. Paul Bremer, III, Administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority and Army Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, commander of coalition ground forces in Iraq)

Secretary Rumsfeld: Good afternoon.

I'm pleased to be back in Iraq. I was here in April and have now been here for the past two days and had meetings with Ambassador Bremer and with General Sanchez and with the American forces throughout the country. I met with the new leader of the Polish Division and must say that I've noticed a good many changes since April.

For one thing there's a free Iraqi press here. Another thing is that Iraq's schools, universities and hospitals are open for business. As we flew over the country we saw a lot of satellite dishes on buildings, homes, businesses. The meeting with the Governing Council clearly was an indication of the progress on the political side. Dozens and dozens of city councils have been formed. The Governing Council exists, which it did not in April. The Governing Council has selected an Interim Cabinet.

I say those simply and easily but they're not simple or easy things. They're



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difficult things and they're significant accomplishments for the Iraqi people.

The selection of Ministers and an Interim Cabinet that are working with the Coalition to restore basic services and approve a budget, to help pave the way for a new constitution for the country, an Iraqi constitution by the Iraqi people, and free elections where the Iraqi people will select a government whose leaders will answer to them instead of the other way around.

This morning we visited a mass grave, one of the many mass graves in this country where the regime of Saddam Hussein had murdered and tortured people and piled them up in fields. We toured a prison. One thing that's clear to me is that for all the difficulties we see in Iraq, and there are difficulties. The security situation still needs to be improved; more people need to find employment. As I flew over the country it was clear to me that one of the great resources of this country, the water, needs to be better managed and to the advantage of the Iraqi people. But for all the difficulties, and there are certainly challenges, the Iraqi people are so much better off today than they were four or five months ago.

The once-privileged elite of the brutal regime are now, in many cases, common prisoners. Some 42 of the 55 Most Wanted have been captured. As confidence grows more and more Iraqis are coming forward and working with General Sanchez and his people to find weapon caches, to provide information about people that are being sought for crimes, and to assist the coalition.

The international presence in my view is impressive. Today I met with the Polish commander, as I mentioned, and there are some 17 countries in that element with four others in support. This is a good thing, I believe, to engage additional countries in Iraq's future.

The other thing that I found impressive was the fact that so many Iraqis are now a part of providing security here in Iraq. To have gone from zero when I was here in April to something like 55,000 Iraqis involved in providing security, whether in the border patrol or the site protection groups, the police, the army, civil defense -- all of these are being increased at a good rate and I believe will create a circumstance over a period of time where we can have high confidence that the responsibility for this security in this important country will be in the hands of the Iraqi people rather than in the hands of Coalition forces which is a good thing.

I would have to say that I did also express my appreciation to the American forces, to the British forces, to all of the Coalition forces that I met with, the appreciation of the American people for the contributions they're making here to try to help the Iraqi people navigate along that path toward a free representative system and a better life for the Iraqi people.

Ambassador Bremer and General Sanchez and I would be happy to respond to questions.

Q: Mr. Secretary.

Rumsfeld: (Inaudible.) It's nice to see you. Should we start with you or should we start with an Iraqi from the Iraqi free press and then come back to you?

Q: Mr. Secretary of Defense, you made no mention about the weapons of mass destruction, your search. Would you tell us if there is anything?

Rumsfeld: You faked me out. (Laughter.) You got me going from here to here to here. I'd be happy to.

This afternoon I met with Dr. David Kay and with General Dayton. They are the leaders of a multinational group called the Iraqi Survey Group that have the responsibility for meeting with people, Iraqis, who have been involved in programs and developing the information that is now being accumulated. At that point where they have a report to make or announcements to make they will do so.

But they have a large team of people. They're working diligently and professionally. We all look forward to hearing what they have to say.

Pam?

Q: Thanks...You all have now had almost six months of this experience. I'm wondering if you could go back six months and change some things that you did, what are those areas? What would you have liked to have known before you came in? What would you have liked to have brought with you?

Rumsfeld: You know when I think back six months, we spent a great deal of time thinking through and planning for a host of things that, terrible things that could have happened that did not happen, and preparing to help cope with them.

There always is a risk in a war of a humanitarian disaster. In the case of this conflict there was not one.

Ten years ago, 12 years ago, there was a serious problem with internally displaced persons and refugees. We were preparing for that. That did not occur in large numbers.

The risks that the dams could have been broken and areas flooded was a concern, and we had preparations to try to deal with that.

The experience in the Gulf War 12 years ago, 11 years ago, of oil wells burning, being set afire by Saddam Hussein and his troops was something that concerned us greatly. And as everyone here knows, the environmental disaster in that instance was just terrible. In this conflict the number of wells was I believe, if I recollect correctly, something that would fit in two hands that were actually destroyed or burned or damaged with bulldozers.

What one does is plan for the things that could be serious, serious problems and then as you go forward you have to deal with the world as you find it.

One of the things that took place in this country that is I think contributing to the circumstance we're in today, the security circumstance we're in today, is that the war really was never finished in terms of the series of battles. Most of the battles that took place were south. As Baghdad was approached the Iraqi forces between north of Baghdad fought for a period, but at some point melded into the countryside and as a result there are still Ba'athist elements that are there that are causing and contributing to the security problem.

I must say we did not anticipate that Saddam Hussein in October, I believe it was, and his forces would open up the prisons and let out some large number in excess of 100,000 criminals and people to be turned loose on the Iraqi people. We're now having to deal with those people.

I'm trying to think what else. What would you add? What would you change?

Q: In hind-sight, 20-20, what would you -- Those are the things that you planned for that didn't happen, but if you were to say do this again in a few years' time, but if you were to do this again what would you bring with you?

Rumsfeld: We'd prefer not. (Laughter.)

In the back there. I don't know your names, so if you'll put your hand up everyone will know who's going to talk. Right there.

Q: Sir, (Inaudible.)

Rumsfeld: I'm not hearing you.

Q: (Inaudible.)

Rumsfeld: Do you want to answer that?

I missed the first part of it. I apologize.

Bremer: As the Secretary said in his opening statement, we are anxious to move as quickly as we can in a responsible fashion towards a sovereign and independent Iraqi government. The path that we have already come along is already very clear. The appointment of the Governing Council; the Governing Council having established a Constitutional Preparatory Committee; and finally the appointment of the Cabinet this week. There are four steps left in the path to sovereignty after taking those three. The next step will be the report of the Preparatory Committee and the convening of a Constitutional Conference to write the constitution.

The step after that will be writing the constitution. This will be done by Iraqis.

The third step on the path towards sovereignty will be the ratification of that constitution by the Iraqi people. For the first time in Iraq's history the Iraqi people will be asked to write a constitution and to approve it.

Then the final step towards a fully sovereign, independent government will be holding elections based on that constitution.

That is a clear path of seven steps -- three of which we've already taken, four of which are to go -- that will lead from where we are today to the Iraqi people having their own government for the first time freely elected.

Rumsfeld: Jim?

Q: Since the car bombing in Najaf armed militias have appeared on the streets of the city. Is this something that you're going to tolerate until you have your own security presence in there? Are you going to disarm them? How are you going to manage that?

Bremer: I saw a story to that effect this morning. The militias that were referred to and that were on the streets in Najaf yesterday and they're still there today, were there with the full authority of the Coalition Provisional Authority and in full cooperation with the Coalition forces. That is to say they were licensed in accordance with our existing programs. They are there temporarily to assist in the security of the holy sites at the request of both the secular and clerical authorities in Najaf.

Q: Just for the record can you say (Inaudible.)?

Rumsfeld: Just one minute. He hasn't --

Bremer: I'm sorry, I didn't hear your question.

Q: If you could just for the record say which are the militias that are authorized --

Bremer: They were not militias. They were members of various groups. There was no one militia. They were from several different groups.

Q: To what extent will the elections impact or influence U.S. policy in Iraq? And vice versa, how U.S. policy in Iraq may impact --

Rumsfeld: No one's translating.

Bremer: He's doing it in English. (Laughter.)

Rumsfeld: Why did I put these on? (Laughter.) Go ahead.

Q: To what extent will the elections impact or influence U.S. policy in Iraq and vice versa, how U.S. policy in Iraq may affect or impact President Bush's campaign?

Rumsfeld: Goodness. The Department of Defense doesn't get into politics and it is not something that I'm in a position to respond to, nor is General Sanchez or Ambassador Bremer.

Yes?

Q: Mr. Secretary...I got an e-mail from a reader today who said, "Now that Rumsfeld has gone all over Iraq for photo opportunities, what has he accomplished that he couldn't have done from his Washington office?"

I wonder if you would tell us what you've accomplished here and if you've found anything that surprises you and changes your mind about anything that you knew before.

Rumsfeld: Well, you know, I get criticized for not traveling enough by some people in some countries, but the reason I felt a need to be here and to visit this region is that because of the importance of what's being done, the fact that there is something in the neighborhood of 130,000 U.S. forces in this country, and it is important that they understand how important what they're doing is to the Iraqi people, to the region, to the United States of America, and to the world. I felt an obligation to meet with them, which I did in three or four or five different

locations in this country, to thank them for their work, to answer their questions, which I did on each occasion.

The second reason I felt it important to come here is I hadn't been here since April. I am continuously asked questions about what's taking place in Iraq, how well our forces are doing, how well the Coalition Provisional Authority is doing, and to have a chance to meet with Ambassador Bremer and his team in several locations in the country was also a very useful thing.

Q: And were you surprised, sir, by anything?

Rumsfeld: Yes.

Q: Mr. Secretary, I am not happy with your answer regarding weapons of mass destruction. Can you please give us at least in one (Inaudible.) what is the result after today?

Rumsfeld: I am inclined not to. I'll tell you what the situation is. The situation is that it's an important question. We have a very large team of people from a number of countries working on the problem. They are meeting with Iraqi people continuously, people that are detained and people that are not detained. They are visiting various sites periodically. Rather than dribbling out pieces of information in a way that causes confusion or debate or discussion, it strikes me that it's useful to let the leadership of that team, which is basically the Central Intelligence Agency and Dr. Kay, proceed in an orderly way and at the right moment bring forward the information they have to the people of the world and they will do so.

Q: According to Iraqis on the ground you are taking a rather long time to restore security and basic services. Why are you taking this long? What are the major obstacles they are encountering? My second question concerning the U.N. Resolution, the new draft. Could you please explain to me, there is a reluctance from the U.S. government to hand over authority on military matters. Thank you.

Rumsfeld: With respect to the first question on security, you say that Iraqi people wonder why it's taking so long. The problem that General Sanchez and the 55,000 Iraqis who are engaged in security and the Coalition forces are facing is I think reasonably well understood. It's a mixture. It's a mixture of remnants of the Ba'athist regime, criminals that were released by the Iraqi regime and set loose on the Iraqi people, and the foreigners who have come over the borders and are engaging in terrorist acts.

Now how long is long? You say why is it taking so long? What is it, four and a half months since major combat operations ended?

Second, the implication that it is not the responsibility of the Iraqi people but it's the responsibility of someone else to provide security is also a misunderstanding of the situation. This country belongs to the Iraqi people and in the last analysis it's the Iraqi people who will provide the security in this country. They will provide the security during the present period by providing information to General Sanchez and to his people about where the people are that are engaging in terrorist acts and killing innocent men, women and children.

Instead of pointing fingers, it seems to me, at the security forces of the Coalition because there are acts of violence taking place against Iraqi people in this country, it's important for the Iraqi people to step up and take responsibility for the security by providing information to General Sanchez and his people to a greater extent than they're doing.

They are increasingly coming forward, and it's a good thing that they do. Because there isn't any way someone can provide security for a people other than the people wanting to have security and stepping forward to participate in providing that security.

Now how long will it take to lower the level? Will it ever be perfect? No. There was crime, there's crime in every country. Terrorists can attack at any time, any place using any technique and you can't defend it every place at every time against every conceivable technique. Will it keep getting better? You bet it will. Is progress being made? Yes it is.

I must say I think that it's never possible to achieve perfection in life. It is also never possible to set timelines as to when certain things are likely to happen. But I do have a high degree of confidence that as the numbers of Iraqis participating in the security process increases -- and it's gone from zero to 55,000 nationwide -- you will see a continued improvement in the security situation.

Q: The U.N. Resolution?

Rumsfeld: The U.N. Resolution. The President made a decision months and months ago that he thought that in the event it was necessary to achieve cooperation with the U.N. Resolution 16 or 17, which the Iraqi regime stood in violation of, in the event it was necessary to use force that he wanted to go to the United Nations and have a fairly broad coalition. He did. He received a resolution approved there and proceeded to fashion a coalition that today, I don't know where it is. What is it, about 20, 30 countries engaged in one way or another and a number of other countries engaged with financial assistance or various types of other cooperation.

We have 130,000 troops. The Coalition has 25,000 roughly, the non-U.S. members of the Coalition. We would like to see a still broader number of countries involved during this period when security is an issue and as we're continuing to increase the numbers of Iraqis who ultimately are going to have to take over security for their country.

How does one do that? Well, one asks countries. So we've gone out for six months now to something in excess of 60 or 70 nations and said who would like to participate? In what ways? A handful, maybe a couple of handfuls have indicated that it would be helpful for them in their parliaments if they had an additional U.N. involvement through a resolution of some sort.

So the President made a decision, properly I think, to go to the U.N. and Secretary Powell is now in the process of discussing with the members of the Security Council the possibility of an additional resolution. I don't know exactly how many additional countries will participate in the event there is another U.N. resolution or how many forces it might amount to, but for the sake of argument say it's X or 2X or 3X. That's a good thing. It's a good thing for Iraq. It's a good thing to have broadened the number of countries that have a stake in the success of this nation.

Q: General Sanchez, yesterday you talked briefly about the frequency and types of attacks your troops are seeing. I wonder if you could expand on that and why you've come to the determination that you do not need more troops?

Sanchez: I was hoping you'd ask me that question.

The last five days we have had an average of 15 attacks per day. Fifty percent of those attacks were attacks that were conducted at a long range, outside of contact of the American and Coalition forces. The enemy has made a decision to stay away and not engage us other than with improvised explosives that are being remotely controlled, or with mortars where they can escape readily.

The other 50 percent of those attacks are attacks that are being conducted with a combination of small arms, rocket-propelled grenades and improvised explosives.

So seven a day occur where we can engage the enemy and kill them in a near battle, and they last about a minute to two minutes. Now tell me that I have a strategic or an operational or a tactical problem here in this country when I have got 160,000 troops on the ground. Absolutely not. There is no risk at any of those levels, at the tactical, operational or strategic level.

The only way that we will fail here in this country is if we choose to walk away from Iraq and make America the next battleground on the global war on terrorism. That's the only way we can lose. That's the choice we have to make here. I don't need additional forces, and the choice that we need to make is to stay right here and defeat the enemy.

Q: Just to clarify, sir. You're talking about combat forces or all forces? Civil Affairs, MPs, all kinds of forces?

Sanchez: The total I have obviously includes all kinds of forces. But given the description of the engagements that I just gave you, a platoon out of one of my battalions can defeat that readily. The threats that we see looming in the future, if there are any, we don't see a major combat formation that can come against this Coalition and defeat any of my divisions. I don't need any more forces.

We've said it repeatedly that what is required here, and the Secretary just highlighted it, is that we need the Iraqi people to help us, give us the intelligence that is necessary for us to go out and defeat these disparate elements that are out there.

Rumsfeld: The other thing we need is what I indicated, and that is to continue the work that Ambassador Bremer and General Sanchez are doing with the city councils and the Governing Council to see that the number of Iraqis involved in providing security continues to ramp up the way it has been in recent months.

Q: Sir, you've touched on this, about how important it is not to fail here. That's the lesson of Afghanistan. But this insistence of not needing more --

Rumsfeld: I'm sorry, what did you say about Afghanistan?

Q: I said analysts are saying one of the lessons of Afghanistan is you can't walk away. You have to succeed here.

My question is why not send in more troops? Why not send in more of everything? Police, civilian engineers, lawyers, advisors. Sort of flood the zone, and then if you have people who don't have jobs to do, send them home, but just sort of send in more and more people.

Rumsfeld: I guess there are several answers to that.

I've always believed that foreign forces in a country are unnatural. They're an anomaly. It's preferable that they not be there. That is to say it's preferable that the people of a country seize their own circumstance and their own future and

develop the institutional capability to govern themselves and to provide security for themselves.

To the extent you "flood the zone" or whatever you said by burying this country in foreign forces, what do you do? You don't fight any more battles because there are only so many terrorists, there are only so many criminals, and there are criminals and terrorists in practically every city in the world. But what you do do is you create this heavy, unnatural presence. And to the extent you do that there's a tendency, not always, but there can be a tendency for the people not to assume their own responsibility but to point fingers and rely on the foreign troops to make life perfect and that's not going to happen.

The people who are going to make this country are the Iraqi people. They are going to provide for their political future. They are going to provide for their security future. Simply flooding the zone with two or three times the number of foreign forces that are here, it would increase the number of targets for the handfuls of criminals and the handfuls of terrorists, for the handfuls of Ba'athist remnants. It would tend to take money that instead of the money going to help rebuild this country or to help train and bring to the fight Iraqi police and Iraqi border patrols, the money would be going towards sustaining foreign forces.

I don't know anybody who's thought this thing through carefully who thinks that that's a good idea. I personally respect what General Sanchez has said.

Q: What about the question of civilians? What about sort of increasing the amount of civilian engineers, lawyers? What happened after Japan, Germany, the higher civilian involvement.

Rumsfeld: It is probably a good idea to have some larger number of civilians from Coalition countries as you -- You don't know what skill sets you're going to need until you talk to people. I met some people today who are doing a street to street cap. They indicated that they could use some additional people to assist in that technical and discreet task. I met them in the morning.

This afternoon I met another group of people who indicated that there is a set of skills in a niche or two that they feel they could use some additional Coalition civilian people that would help the process move along. So those are the kinds of things we find out, and as we find those things out Ambassador Bremer tells us and we do our best to try to help recruit from our country and from other countries people to help do that.

Voice: Mr. Secretary, we have time for one more question.

Rumsfeld: Right back there. I think we're alternating.

Q: [Not in English]

Rumsfeld: Let me take the first piece and then I'll ask Ambassador Bremer to comment on the second piece.

You asked about the U.N. Resolution and whether it would result in additional troops. I don't know. It could. I think it will. Those are the kinds of discussions that are taking place. The reason I think it could result in some number of additional troops, which as I say I think would be a good thing. I think it would broaden the number of countries that are interested in seeing Iraq succeed. But until the resolution is negotiated and until that additional U.N. involvement -- the U.N. has been involved from the beginning, as you know, and is today in various ways -- but until the resolution is finished you won't know what the effect on the countries that are currently being met with on this subject will be. In some cases it's the cabinets, in some cases it's the parliaments and it varies from country to country.

You asked why does a French veto or not agree with things? I think that's an open question. I don't know where they'll stand on this resolution. I know that Secretary Powell is talking to all the members of the Security Council, but obviously they've had a different view from the outset. But it's not for me to predict how they might address the resolution because the resolution language hasn't even been completed.

Do you want to comment on getting Iraqis employed and engaged in the reconstruction? I know you're working your head off to do it.

Bremer: Let me make three points because I know we're at the end.

First of all, we absolutely agree it's important to engage Iraqis in this. I have several thousand Iraqis working for the Coalition Authority right now and we will employ more.

Secondly, I have given instructions to any of the contracts which we are putting in Iraq for them to be given to Iraqi firms wherever possible with the objective of employing as many Iraqis as possible.

I'll give you one example of an emergency construction program, which I established six weeks ago to clean up the canals in the area south of Baghdad down to Basra. An area where during the last 11 years Saddam Hussein would not spend any money on maintaining the canals.

We set in motion an emergency program and we have so far given employment to more than 100,000 Iraqis in cleaning up over 5,000 kilometers of canals just in that one program.

The Coalition has completed almost 6,000 separate reconstruction projects throughout this country and have given employment in all of those projects preferentially to Iraqis. I would think we have probably employed tens of thousands of Iraqis in those other projects, too.

We entirely agree with you. We must find jobs for Iraqis, and it's one of our top priorities.

Rumsfeld: Thank you very much.



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