






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Presenter: Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld

Thursday, September 11, 2003

Secretary Rumsfeld Interview with The News Hour with Jim Lehrer

(Interview with Jim Lehrer, The News Hour with Jim Lehrer, PBS.)

Q: And to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, who joins us now for a Newsmaker interview. Mr. Secretary, welcome.

Rumsfeld: Thank you.

Q: First, today's news about this Osama bin Laden tape. What do you make of that and the threat he made for more attacks even worse than the ones we had two years ago?

Rumsfeld: Well, the al Qaeda has been put under enormous pressure. A good many of them have been captured or killed. Their ability to function has been significantly affected. They're still dangerous. No question about that. They can still conduct attacks, but what we've seen since we moved them out of Afghanistan and took away the Taliban from Afghanistan, running that country, the pattern has been that every period of months they'll come out with an audiotape or a videotape.

And I'm not an expert on this, and I haven't seen this particular tape. But the



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general feeling in the government is that what they're doing is trying to pretend that they're functioning well, leave the impression that people should give them money, their financiers, leave the impression that they're a viable organization and that they should get recruits and just generally give encouragement to their people. Of course, the purpose -- they're terrorists, and the purpose of terrorism is to terrorize. So by using an information operations campaign like this, they are hoping also to terrorize people and frighten them.

Q: Does it work?

Rumsfeld: Well, I guess time will tell. We've made it very difficult for them to raise money, to move money, to move people across lines, to communicate with each other. Many of these tapes no one knows precisely when they were made.

Q: Sure.

Rumsfeld: And when the video footage was taken. So if he is alive, which he may very well be or may not be, as far as I know, if he is alive and he's not able to function, doing what they're doing with tapes is probably the smartest thing they could do.

Q: It must be awfully galling to you though to think that this guy might be alive out there somewhere.

Rumsfeld: No.

Q: No?

Rumsfeld: No, not really, no. If you think about it, it's very hard to find a single individual. We haven't found Mullah Omar; we haven't found Saddam Hussein. Now, we've found something like 42 out of the top 55 in Iraq, which is good. And some of them turned themselves in I should point out. But think how long people are on the FBI's most wanted list. Some are on there ten years, fifteen years.

Q: But they don't have the whole U.S. Army and the whole U.S. Military going after them. I mean, all I'm saying is --

Rumsfeld: But, Jim, the U.S. Army, Navy and Air Force are organized, trained, and equipped to fight armies, navies, and air forces -- they're not trained to find one person, the needle in the haystack.

Q: So it doesn't upset you that you haven't found this guy?

Rumsfeld: No, we'd like to find him. We're putting a lot of pressure on him, and I think we will find -- get closure on him as well as on Saddam Hussein at some point, and the sooner the better.

Q: Sure. On Iraq, how does the situation -- is the situation on the ground there now about what you expected it would be four months after the end of the Saddam Hussein regime?

Rumsfeld: Oh, goodness. It's so hard to do that because, first of all, the situation on the ground there is not a situation that's universal across the country. It's vastly different in different parts of the country. It's different in the Kurdish area. It's different in the area between Baghdad and Tikrit which was the stronghold of the Ba'athists. It's different in the south near Basra. It's different in the Shia areas and our commanders have to be flexible. They have to deal with the facts on the ground as they find them.

And they're doing things very differently in different parts of that country with very good reason: Because the situations are very different. One thing that I would have to say is the -- maybe we should have known it because if you go back and think of what the Soviet Union did to their infrastructure by denying it, by spending so much money on military things and palaces and so forth in the case of Iraq, they really did deny the infrastructure.

The water system has not been taken care of. The oil infrastructure needs enormous investment because they haven't given it the money that it ought to have. The infrastructure is in worse shape in that country than one would have guessed, I think.

Q: You expected it to be in better shape, right?

Rumsfeld: We expected it to be in better shape. A Stalinist-like economic approach, a centralized and spending so much money on military affairs and in the case of Saddam Hussein all these palaces and stashing billions of dollars outside the country, he was starving and robbing the Iraqi people.

Q: Did you expect this military resistance, these pockets of resistance, the bombings, the shootings of U.S. troops, all of that?

Rumsfeld: There was certainly a speculation that that was a possibility.

Q: But did you go in prepared for it? Did your folks go in prepared for this?

Rumsfeld: Prepared? I mean, we were prepared for lots of things. We were prepared for humanitarian crisis that didn't happen. We were prepared for lighting off all the oil wells and only a couple of handfuls were actually burning that we were able to stop. You expect resistance, particularly when the Ba'athists collapsed north of Baghdad and did not go into the fight really.

And they bled into the countryside and so they're still there. So while the major combat operations ended May 1. What you've got now is a low-intensity conflict that is going to continue until more of those people are rooted out. And that's going on every day. There's probably twelve, fifteen incidents a day where our forces are engaged.

Q: Looking back on it, do you think that that was a strategy of Saddam Hussein and his people from the beginning that knowing full well there was no way they could defeat a United States force, that they were going to just drop back and that was part of their deal and they're just carrying out what they've planned all along?

Rumsfeld: Well, they fought South. So -- I don't know. We very likely -- we've got enough people now. We've captured or killed 42 out of the top 55, and we've got a good chunk of them. We're interrogating them. We may get some visibility into that question. It will be very interesting to see if it was a strategy.

Q: What's your own feeling about it?

Rumsfeld: Well, I think right now what we're dealing with there is several things. We're dealing with the fact that in October, Saddam Hussein opened the prisons and let all the criminals out -- a hundred and ten, a hundred and twenty thousand of them -- imagine.

Q: What kinds of criminals were they?

Rumsfeld: All kinds. Every size and shape, murderers and rapists and --

Q: Did he arm them, give them weapons or do you know?

Rumsfeld: I don't know. I don't think so. I think they just let them out on society, a terrible thing. And they're out there, these folks, so they're bad people. Second are the Baathists that we didn't get a chance to fight in the area north of Baghdad and third are the foreign fighters who have been coming in from neighboring countries and trying to kill coalition people and trying to help reestablish a Ba'athist regime. Now, you have to deal with each of those groups

differently because they're different kinds of people.

Q: Now, two questions. Let's start at the end and work back. Why can't our forces stop these people, these foreign types from coming into Iraq?

Rumsfeld: Well, that's like asking do you think our borders with Mexico and Canada are sealed or are they porous? Do people move back and forth across them that we don't know about?

Q: Now Mr. Secretary, you know that's not a good analogy, the United States and Canada.

Rumsfeld: The United States and Mexico. I mean a border is a problem.

Q: Right. Okay.

Rumsfeld: Look at the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Look at the border between Iran and Afghanistan. The borders between Iran and Iraq are porous. The borders between Syria --

Q: And we can't do anything about it.

Rumsfeld: Of course we can do some things about it and we are doing some things about it but can you make them sealed? Not likely. Think of the borders. You have got Kuwait. You've got Saudi Arabia. You've got Jordan. You've got Turkey. You've got Iran.

Q: And they're coming from all of those, all of those places?

Rumsfeld: Very likely. And of course these folks are very skilled at fake passports and they bribe, they pay money.

Q: But are they coming in large numbers?

Rumsfeld: No.

Q: Like what? Give us --

Rumsfeld: Hard to know. We don't have good visibility.

Q: Hundreds, thousands of these -- ?

Rumsfeld: Oh, certainly hundreds.

Q: And they've come to cause trouble and to kill people.

Rumsfeld: Sure. We've scooped them up and arrested them and killed them. There's something in excess of 100 just from one or two countries. And we've got that many that have been captured and killed. And some of them have in their -- they have money that they've been given to do this. They've got leaflets that recruited them.

Q: Who is doing all this? Who is paying for them? Who is recruiting them?

Rumsfeld: It varies. One of the things that we've seen is in the country some of these people that are engaging in these attacks have been paid to do it. They're kind of unemployed or they're people that are available for criminals and the Ba'athists are paying them. The Ba'athists have money.

Q: Yeah. Now where did that come from? That's the money they stole before the end --

Rumsfeld: It's the money they stole from the Iraqi people for 30 years.

Q: Second question then: Why can't we find these Baathists and get rid of them?

Rumsfeld: They are. They're finding them all the time. They're continuing to --

Q: Why is it so difficult? Why is it taking so long?

Rumsfeld: It's been four-and-a-half months. What's taking so long? Jim! My goodness, four-and-a-half months since May 1st! It's amazing to think that people think that you can take a country the size of California, 23 million people, and 30 years or 20-plus years of Saddam Hussein with a Stalinist economy, with a repressive regime, turn 110,000 criminals loose, have foreigners come in and try to attack the people, have the Ba'athists with lots of money hiring people to do these things, and you say why is it taking so long?

Q: Well, what I'm talking about --

Rumsfeld: Isn't it amazing what's been accomplished in four-and-a-half months? We've gone from 0 to 55,000 Iraqis that are now providing for their own security: policemen, border guards, site protection, civil defense, army.

Q: Rightly or wrongly, Mr. Secretary, I went back and checked the record today, the impression that was given in public statements and all that sort of thing was that when this war ended, this war was going to end, that when Saddam Hussein and his regime, you know, fell, then the rest of it was going to be kind of a mop-up. And I'm just --

Rumsfeld: Not by me.

Q: Okay. All right.

Rumsfeld: You don't have quotes from --

Q: I don't have mop-up quotes and that sort of thing from you. But there was a general impression, as I say, rightly or wrongly --

Rumsfeld: There were some people who were quite optimistic that there would be a surrender of their army in a formal way.

Q: Right.

Rumsfeld: In fact, what happened was they didn't surrender. The intelligence was not perfect on that. They bled into the countryside. We had maybe ten, twelve thousand surrendered out of a much bigger universe.

Q: But you do understand why people ask questions that are like I just asked you, do you not?

Rumsfeld: Sure, we've got 24 hour news. People are impatient.

Q: No, no I'm not talking about news. I'm talking about, you know, the impression that was left --

Rumsfeld: Some people, as I say, did leave the impression that their view was that. My view was I didn't know. And I didn't ever give optimistic suggestions because I knew I didn't know.

Q: The troops question. Sending more U.S. troops -- you've made it very clear on more than one occasion you do not believe more U.S. troops are needed. Do you still feel that way?

Rumsfeld: Here's the situation. We've got commanders on the ground and they say they don't want more U.S. troops. We've got General Sanchez who is in charge of the country who says he does not want more U.S. troops. More U.S.

troops from his standpoint would mean more force protection, more combat support, and he says that he's got about on a daily basis fifteen, twelve, fifteen, eighteen incidents a day. They last two or three minutes.

Q: Incidents meaning --

Rumsfeld: Combat.

Q: -- conflict between --

Rumsfeld: Military conflict where somebody is attacking somebody or somebody is doing something. Some we initiate. Others they initiate. And we've got 130,000 troops there. And he said he does not have a strategic or tactical military threat to deal with. He's got a security problem.

And what he wants is more Iraqis to help provide for the security in that country. Some people look at it and they say, well, you've got 130,000, you're still having some people killed. If 130,000 are good, let's double it, 260,000. And that's better. Why not triple it? And General Sanchez and General Myers and General Abizaid believe that that would be a bad idea.

Now, there's another reason it's a bad idea. If you go to Afghanistan, the Soviet Union had 300,000 troops in Afghanistan and they couldn't do the job. We have 10,000 in there and it's making steady progress. Why? Because we don't want to occupy a country. The Soviets wanted to own Afghanistan.

We don't want to own Afghanistan. We don't want to own Iraq. We want to help them get on their feet and then move out. We do not want to put so many forces in there that we create a dependency on us and then have to stay. We want to keep creating an environment where they can take over their security.

Q: Senator McCain in the Senate hearings yesterday raised this question about the troops and it went like this: Hey, wait a minute, General Sanchez, the president said in his speech the other night that the commander, the U.S. commanders have asked for another division of troops and want them to be international troops. Senator McCain asked this question: What's the difference between international troops and U.S. troops?

Rumsfeld: Oh, it's easy. We have a lot of responsibilities around the world. We have had 130,000, which is a lot, of our forces in that country. And we feel that it's important that there be a broader international base. It's good for Iraq. There are more countries that will have a stake in the future of Iraq's success. We now, for example, the Polish division in there has seventeen countries with

troops in that division and another four in support. So we've got a broad coalition of 29 countries now. We'd like to see it broader.

Second, we're going to have to rotate our forces. And if we can get another one international division in addition to the Polish division, in addition to the British division, then that will be that much less pressure on our forces. Third, the real goal is to build up the Iraqi forces, which further relieves pressure on our forces.

But the goal is not to increase our total number of forces. The goal is to provide security, and the best way to do that is to keep creating the Iraqi capability to provide for their own security.

Q: So the U.S. commanders are not saying we need another division. They're saying there's only one kind of -- it can only be one kind of division, an international division so it doesn't grow out of a need on the ground. It's a political need?

Rumsfeld: It is advantageous to get more countries engaged in Iraq, absolutely. I believe that. But what we really want is more Iraqis. If we go from 0 to 55,000 Iraqis doing things for the police and the border guards and these types of things, then Iraq is going to be able to replace us and the international coalition.

That's a good thing. That's where we want to go. We don't want to put more U.S. forces in there and create a -- take more of the responsibility on ourselves and create more of a dependency on the part of Iraq on our providing for their security. That's not the direction we should go. Now, let me say this.

Q: Sure.

Rumsfeld: If the commander said, look, the situation militarily is such that we need more forces and they recommended that, and we believed that that's a good thing to do, the president would put them in in a minute. But that is not the case.

Q: So they're not saying -- just to make sure I understand. They're not saying we need another division of troops.

Rumsfeld: No, they're not.

Q: So why did the president say that in his speech that the commanders have asked for another division of international troops?

Rumsfeld: We have. We're out trying to get other countries to put in additional troops. And we believe we have a chance of getting maybe another division. We've got two foreign divisions now, two international divisions. The Brits lead one, the Poles lead one. And they're doing a good job. If we could add one more, that's just that much less pressure on us. If we can add more Iraqis, that's still less pressure on us.

Q: On this issue we were talking about a minute ago, the borders, General Sanchez was asked the same question I asked you. Why don't you shut the borders? He said I don't have enough troops to do that.

Rumsfeld: Think what it would take. Think what it would take in our country. Oh, my goodness. The question is: how do you want to use your troops? What we want to do is get the neighbors to help patrol the borders in Kuwait, in Jordan, in Saudi Arabia and they're going to do that. We've got some ways that we can do a better job along Iran and Syria. We're hiring more and more Iraqi border guards, training them and putting them there. There's some other things we can do to make the border -- but in terms of making it -- sealing it, not likely.

Q: I'm sure you know, you're taking some heat on this troops issue. Tom Donnelly, the American Enterprise Institute, avid advocate and supporter of the military action wrote in the Weekly Standard that -- he referred to you as the secretary of stubbornness on this issue.

Rumsfeld: Well, look, I happen to be the one who has asked to respond to questions. I'm not the one who decides how many troops we need there. The commanders, the military commanders -- you talk to every single one of them, that's their recommendation. I happen to agree with them. And then I articulate it.

And the implication that I'm stubborn, we would be happy to increase the number of troops or reduce the number of troops. And I haven't heard substantively any good arguments from the critics, from those people. They do not marshal arguments in a way that is persuasive. Now, if I heard a persuasive argument from anyone, I'd listen to it. And so would the commanders, but we haven't heard one.

Q: Senator McCain again. What he said yesterday, his argument for doing -- sending in U.S. troops, whatever it takes to get this thing done is that time is running out.

Rumsfeld: True. Yeah, that's fair.

Q: That's his argument.

Rumsfeld: And then the question is: What do you think is the best thing to do? Do you want to do what the Soviets did in Afghanistan and flood it, flood the zone as they say in football, flood it with 300,000 people and lose -- and become an occupier, be oppressive, be everywhere, be in everyone's business?

I don't think so. I think that -- I honestly believe that the important thing is to create an environment where the Iraqi people can take over their own security and we can leave. We do not want to create a dependency there.

Q: What would you say to somebody who says I'm not saying this, okay, I'm making up somebody who is saying this, okay.

Rumsfeld: Okay.

Q: Who says, well, what if you sent in 300,000 troops and you could very quickly secure this country in such a way that the Iraqis could run it, you could take care of the Ba'athists; you could take care of the borders, so you could make everything happen faster.

Rumsfeld: If you have 130,000 U.S. troops there now and 55,000 Iraqis and another 22,000 international troops, doing what they're doing and you're only getting ten or twelve or fifteen incidents a day that last two or three minutes, what would the 300,000 do? What would they do? Now, it's an interesting thing. I've heard people who feel very strongly on this. And I listen carefully to what they say --

Q: There are stories every day as you know about this. They're all over you about this issue.

Rumsfeld: I understand that. But it is never, to me, I've never heard a good, sound, substantive argument that is persuasive. To me what's persuasive is what the commanders say and the commanders are unanimous on this. It's their opinion, it's not my opinion. So your friend, if he wants to talk about stubbornness, he can talk about stubbornness for the entire chain of command.

Q: He's not my friend. I just read his speech in the magazine. He's not my friend. There have been some stories also in the last few days about that you've grown testy and defensive about criticism. In fact you've suggested that criticism of U.S. policy is encouraging -- could be encouraging terrorists to shoot U.S. soldiers in Iraq.

Rumsfeld: I brought my quote in.

Q: I've got it right here too.

Rumsfeld: And you don't have it. I'll bet you. I'll bet you you've got what some newspaper printed.

Q: Okay. Read it.

Rumsfeld: Is that right?

Q: Sure.

Rumsfeld: I was asked the question, there are a lot of critics criticizing the president and you and does that complicate your effort in Iraq or Afghanistan? And I said it does make -- it makes it complicated sometimes. It makes it difficult. That's life. And I finished by saying, that does not mean there should not be debate on these issues. There should be debate and discussion on these issues. We can live with that. We can live with a healthy debate as long as it's elevated as possible and as civil as possible. Is that testy, Jim? I don't think so.

Q: Well --

Rumsfeld: I think it's --

Q: Are you saying you did not say that some of this criticism could encourage terrorists to shoot against --

Rumsfeld: I'll tell you what I said. I said to the extent that the terrorists are given reason to believe that he might prevail in some way and they take heart from that and it leads to more money going into these activities or that leads to more recruits or that leads to more encouragement or more staying power on the part of the terrorists obviously it makes our task more difficult.

The next sentence is, that does not mean there should not be debate. That's the context. There should be debate and discussion on these things. We can live with that. We can live with a healthy debate as long as it's elevated and reasonably civil. Now that is a very balanced statement. That is not testy.

Q: Okay. Some of the Democratic presidential candidates have fired back at you and said you have questioned their patriotism.

Rumsfeld: I don't do politics.

Q: What, meaning you didn't -- you were not talking about the Democratic presidential candidates?

Rumsfeld: Absolutely not. That subject never came up in the conversation when I was asked this. They talked about critics. There are lots of critics including the ones you quote.

Q: Right, right.

Rumsfeld: No, I do not get into politics at all. It's the season. That's life. We can live with it.

Q: Okay.

Rumsfeld: It's healthy. We like a good debate.

Q: Got it, got it, got it! On weapons of mass destruction, the president the other night -- and I quote -- he said, the former regime -- I'm not quoting yet. But he said the former regime wants, quote, possessed and used weapons of mass destruction, end quote.

Seven words, that's all he said about it. My question is -- and some folks have suggested this and see if you agree -- is this a subtle indirect way of saying never mind Saddam Hussein didn't really have weapons of mass destruction before we launched our attack?

Rumsfeld: No, no, the president --

Q: At the time? No?

Rumsfeld: No, the president is very straightforward. What he said is true. And we've got a team of people, lots of people, hundreds of people out there, tracking down, interrogating people, looking at suspect sites. And they're going about it in an orderly way. I mean it's an enormous country. It's the size of California. And we found places where they buried airplanes, MiG fighter aircraft are buried underground. Now think of that. There's lots of things buried there.

Another man took the folks into the backyard near a rosebush and started digging and came up with materials from laboratories. Now is it going to take some time, yes? Has it already taken four and a half months, yes? Is this group

proceeding in an orderly, sensible way? Yes. Will at some point they come out and report what they've found? Yes.

Q: Let's cut to the crunch on this question. If in fact this team does not find any weapons of mass destruction, do you believe that would do serious harm to the credibility of the president and this administration and particularly on the -- in the long run and when history looks back on this?

Rumsfeld: I mean, the intelligence that our country had -- has -- was over a sustained period of time, it was validated by other intelligence services. I have to believe it was reasonably correct -- obviously not perfect. No intelligence is ever perfect. And that as the reports come out, they will find evidence of the kinds of programs that Secretary Powell presented to the United Nations. That's my -- yes, I mean that's what I believe.

Q: But if they don't? Is that a problem?

Rumsfeld: I don't do hypotheticals.

Q: You don't do politics; you don't do hypotheticals.

Rumsfeld: I don't. I don't. Why? I can't speculate.

Q: Tomorrow will be the second anniversary of 9/11. An airplane went into the Pentagon, of course, into -- two planes went into New York and another one in Pennsylvania. But a plane went into your building not far from where you and I are sitting. You were in the building at the time. Do you still think about that?

Rumsfeld: Of course. I mean we lost hundreds of people and thousands nationwide.

Q: I mean, do you think about those moments?

Rumsfeld: Sure, you bet. And I also think about the statement that was made to me shortly thereafter when I was in the Gulf and a senior leader there said to me, maybe that was a blessing in disguise. Maybe that will wake up the world to the fact that there are people out teaching people to kill innocent men, women and children. They're being taught that as young kids, and if the world doesn't wake up, there will be so many of those people and they will have weapons so powerful that maybe there be will a 9/11 -- a September 11 -- not where 3,000 are killed but 30,000 or 300,000. And that would be a terrible thing, he said. We've got -- this has to be a wake-up call for the world.

Q: Was he right? Do you feel that it was a wake-up call?

Rumsfeld: I think so absolutely, yeah. I mean, 90 countries cooperating right now, right now 90 countries cooperating and putting pressure on terrorist networks; that's probably the biggest coalition in history.

Q: Let me ask you this. Right after within the days, weeks after 9/11 many, many people said that the United States of America and the American people will have been changed forever by what happened on that day. We sit here two years later. Do you agree?

Rumsfeld: I think so. I think we've had to face the vulnerabilities that are there for the 21st century. And they weren't there in that way for us. With these two big oceans and friends North and South, we've had a rather protected, safe environment. With terrorists being able to get access to jet airplanes and laptops and wire transfers and all kinds of electronics, with the proliferation of technologies that relate to a chemical and biological and radiation weapons and you look forward and you think, that's going to be a quite different world. There are two or three terrorist states that are potentially going to be nuclear powers in the next three or four, five, eight, ten, twelve years. That creates a different environment that we're going to be living in.

Q: How about here?

Rumsfeld: I think that people have registered that. They're concerned for their safety. We are free people. We don't want to live in fear. We don't want to be terrorized. We know there's no way to defend against it. The only way to deal with it is to go after the terrorists where they are. We're killing, capturing terrorists in Iraq which is a -- Baghdad today which is a whale of a lot better than Boise.

Q: Mr. Secretary, thank you very much.

Rumsfeld: Thank you.

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