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**Presenter:** Mr. Lawrence Di Rita, Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense,  
Public Affairs

Wednesday, October 22,  
2003

### DoD News Briefing - Mr. Lawrence Di Rita

(Addressing Secretary Rumsfeld's 16 October Memo)

Memo can be found at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Oct2003/d20031016sdmemo.pdf>

And I can answer a few questions on the memo, if that would be helpful.

Q Yeah.

Q Sure.

Q Thank you.

Q Can you give us the memo?

MR. DI RITA: Can I give you the memo? I don't know. But let me just, if I can, to get back to the original question, this was not -- whatever this memo was -- and I think Mr. Saxton and Mr. Turner both characterized it pretty well -- it was not a memo about Iraq and it was not a memo about Afghanistan. It was a memo about the global war on terror, trying to ask the kinds of questions that need to be asked, that any leader should be asking, and that other leaders in this government have been asking in Congress and the administration, about the big questions in the war on terror.

Are we -- is the government, and in particular, the memo was focused on the Department of Defense -- is the department that was essentially created in the middle -- at the end of World War II to face a very different set of challenges the same way we would design the department today if we knew that we could start over with the challenges that we face going forward?

This is a question that Secretary Rumsfeld has been asking in a variety of ways since he took office. Again, the transformation -- the need to transform, the need to rethink all of the long-standing ways we approach problems is just not breaking news when it comes to Secretary Rumsfeld's sense of urgency that he's placed behind those.

Q (Off mike) -- as some bleak picture of Iraq -- ?

MR. DI RITA: Look, I don't want to --

Q -- as long-term --

MR. DI RITA: There's nothing in the memo -- you know, when the secretary describes that things

are going on, or when other describe in Baghdad that -- or in Iraq generally, you know, there are some good things going on and some bad things going on, and people say, "All you want is the good news out there." No. We're looking for sort of a more sort of sophisticated and nuanced perception of reality than what you get by just constant sort of focus on one aspect of what's going on.

And I guess I'd characterize the characterization of the memo the same way. The secretary's not saying anything like what the memo's been characterized. What he's doing is elevating the perspective of the leadership of this department and asking: I don't know the answers to these questions, but they're on my mind, and I want them on your mind, too, because getting toward the answers to those questions are (sic) going to help us as we think through the very kind of basic issues. How do we know, for example, that -- how can we measure -- how do we know that we're capturing or killing more terrorists than are being created every year, than are being trained to hate freedom, to hate sort of -- certainly, America, but countries that share our values. How do we know that we're stopping more of those types of people, that sort of cancer, than is being created? That's a fair question. And until we know that, we won't know where we are in the global war on terror.

Q: We ask those questions all the time, and the sense we get from the Pentagon is why don't you ask more happy questions? Like, why are you always asking these critical questions?

MR. DI RITA: If you're asking these questions all the time, then you share the same set of question sets that the secretary has been raising, and others in the government. This is not just about Secretary Rumsfeld's memo, but this is a memo in which he crystallized his thinking on some of these issues. And again, it's easy to talk about it in the context of Afghanistan or Iraq, but that's manifestly not what this memo's about. What this memo is about is going forward well beyond the horizon that any one of us is going to be serving, are we prepared or postured in a way that will win what we've all said is going to be a long-term fight? So --

Q Can we have a copy, I mean, if it's not secret?

MR. DI RITA: It's a thought. It's a thought.

Q I mean, since it's not a secret.

Q If we can't, is there anything in the USA Today's printing of it that is incorrect or that eliminated parts --

MR. DI RITA: I'm told that the USA Today article links to a website that may have the memo on it.

Q It does. But is that incorrect? I mean, is there --

MR. DI RITA: I've scanned it. It looks pretty close. I mean, I haven't done a word-for-word comparison so I think --

Q (Off mike) -- if there's an omission in there that we should know about?

MR. DI RITA: Yeah, there was the one line that said, "This is not meant to be grim," but I guess that didn't make it in the -- (laughter) --

Q They dropped that, huh?

MR. DI RITA: I've got time for maybe one more. I've got to go too.

Q Given that you're characterizing this memo as sort of, you know, just another chapter in the secretary's trying to transform the military and inform the senior leadership, why did it come out now? Why -- was there an event, something that -- because these are the kinds of things that we've already heard from the Defense Department and transformation --

MR. DI RITA: Well, but I think it sort of -- when you're trying to get a message to stick, you say it a lot. And the secretary and other leaders in this department -- the chairman, the deputy secretary, General Pace, and others -- are very mindful of the need to repeat the basic principles a lot because people need to always be reminded: what are we working on, what are the things we're doing.

And let me just -- you know, we have -- well, you know, the memo sort of refers to it, so let me get into it just a little bit. But he has had -- he gets regular meetings and briefings about sort of the status of things -- what are we doing and where are we. And he had a similar meeting of that nature recently with senior military commanders, and they gave a very good accounting of the work that they're doing in their areas of operations. And it's a sort of linear projection of the things we're doing now and how we're going to keep doing them and do them better. And that's very important, and it's the way we're going to continue succeeding in Iraq and the way we're going to continue succeeding in Afghanistan, for example.

But on the basis of that discussion, and similar discussions, it wasn't just that one, it occurred to the secretary that it might be useful to sort of pull up a little bit and remind people that, A, this is a global war on terror, it is not a war in Iraq, it is not a war in Afghanistan; it's a global war on terror that gets to fundamental questions of how the United States is organized, how the military is organized, how it's trained, how it's equipped to succeed.

And so, it was -- I sort of -- I think in reflection of a discussion where it was more of a status discussion -- Here's where we are; and over the next six months we're going to be doing this. That's important, and he needed --

Q But --

MR. DI RITA: Let me finish, please. And that's important. But I think on the basis of that, he wanted to inject at this particular time a sense that while that's all very important, remember to look up and look beyond the tree tops because the things that we really need to think about that are going to extend well beyond our tenure is: Are we organized the right way? Do we have -- and again, he doesn't know the answers to these questions.

That's not his -- his style is to ask questions of people that are likely to be more -- or I should say more likely to have the answers or be able to develop the answers. And he doesn't have the answers. So there isn't, I don't think, any one of the queries in that memo in which anybody should assume he knows the answer and he's waiting for somebody to kind of parrot it back, because that's not his -- that's not the way he operates.

Q But this is the kind of stuff you guys say every day to us and on TV. I mean, this should be --

MR. DI RITA: I agree. I was a little surprised to see it got such coverage, because it is --

Q Is it a sign, though, that somebody in the Pentagon or in the leadership, if this is an internal memo, just isn't getting it?

MR. DI RITA: I don't know. I've described it what it is. And that is, to some significant extent -- and believe me, I'm grateful to hear that you are hearing this all the time. I think that people who spend time with the secretary, including combatant commanders and others, are hearing it all the time.

But again, it's perfectly natural and understandable for people to be working a set of problems and want to improve their capability to achieve -- to make success against that set of problems and still need to be reminded of the fact that when you work through these programs, don't forget it's bigger. And, you know, there's -- you know, there's a need to enlarge the scope about what we're doing and remind people that the scope is enlarged; this isn't just a war in Afghanistan or Iraq, it's a war on terror. It's a war where the enemy will adapt, is already adapting, and if we aren't flexible enough in our institutions to adapt, it's fair to wonder, you know, how long-term can we engage in this. And we're going to engage it

long-term. The president has said that, the secretary and others. So it's a constant sense of urgency. It's what he does. He injects urgency. He asks questions and he gets people thinking about things, and that's what this memo, hopefully, will do. It appears to have had that effect.

Q Has someone actually tasked to develop a yardstick to determine if you're winning this war against global terrorism?

MR. DI RITA: This isn't a tasking memo. Certainly it's well understood, at least for those who understand the secretary, as it sounds like many of you do, that he's asked this question a lot, he's going to continue to ask it. And, you know, he's the kind of guy that likes to sort of plant a flag down the - down road and then kind of, without knowing how we're going to get there, get people working generally in that direction. And if it needs to be altered, then that group of sort of intellectual capital will help him alter it. And that's where it is.

So this is not sort of an action item, "Get back to me by the 15th on these three things." These are clearly big questions that deserve big thinking. And the people that he addressed it to are the people that will be able to engage the rest of this institution into that kind of thinking. So that was the purpose of the memo.

Q Sir, does the department still have confidence that General Boykin can do his job without distracting from your goals on the war on terrorism? I mean, you're going into another news cycle, that -- you know, this story's not going away.

I mean, is this something that --

MR. DI RITA: Here's what's gone on. General Boykin said he apologizes for anybody having taken offense to his statements, and in fact, he's not sure that his statements were reported in the way that -- but putting that aside, he simply apologized for it. He further said that he doesn't intend to make these kinds of speeches anymore, in particular because of the position that he's in. And then, he asked for an inspector general to come and investigate him.

Now, when you balance that against this officer's distinguished military career, it's -- some people might think that's a close balancing, but at the moment, there isn't anybody who thinks that he can't -- recognizing that he, again, has apologized; has acknowledged that he's not going to give any more of these speeches, precisely because of the position that he's in, among other reasons, and asked to be investigated. That is not a sort of minor set of actions that he took on his part to demonstrate his understanding that the president's policy, the secretary's policy, on how we view this war, how I think most of the American people view it, is what it is. The secretary's talked about it, the president's talked about it. His statement acknowledges that he understands that, Boykin.

When you weigh all that, again, in the preponderance of a military career that is just very distinguished and very much committed to all the very principles that we think have been exposed by his comments -- may have been exposed by his comments in terms of the freedom of speech and the freedom of religion --

Q I have a -- (inaudible) -- to that.

Q Wait a minute.

MR. DI RITA: Okay, okay, okay. Hold on. Let me just finish this statement. When you -- I'm not here to defend his statements, and I don't intend to, okay? He's spoken on his own for his statements. I've not seen the tapes. I've seen some of them, and I know there's a lot more out there. I'm not here to defend his statements. What I'm here to do is say he took these actions, including he asked to be investigated, which we're going to do, and that's going to take a certain amount of time, and when you weigh the preponderance of all those things, nobody's thinking about asking him to step aside.

I don't have any further things. Thank you very much.

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