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Presenter: Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld Thursday, November 6, 2003 12:00 p.m. EST

DoD News Briefing - Secretary Rumsfeld and Gen. Myers

(Participating were Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld and Air Force Gen. Richard B. Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.)

Rumsfeld: Good afternoon. The troops deployed in Operation Iraqi Freedom have a great deal to be proud of. They have rescued a nation and liberated a people. And today, they are fighting terrorists and regime remnants and doing a great deal to help the Iraqi people get on a path to stability and self-government.

As we've indicated, the bulk of the U.S. troops that are currently in Iraq will be rotating out beginning next, I guess, January, February, March, April, in that period. And they will, needless to say, be replaced. The combat units serving in Iraq and most of the supporting units in the theater will be replaced over the coming period of months. We've notified some 85,000 combat personnel, comprising active units and three Guard combat brigades, that they'll be rotating into the theater. Two of these Guard units were alerted and mobilized over the past several weeks. The third will mobilize on November 15th.

To support them, the Department of Defense began alerting some 43,000 Guard and Reserve that they may be mobilized for service in Operation Iraqi Freedom. We also began alerting some 3,700 Guard and Reserve forces who may be mobilized for service in Operation Enduring Freedom. These figures comprise the majority of the Guard and Reserve forces, both Army and Marine, that will be alerted, but we can expect some additional Army alerts in the period ahead.

General Schwartz, General Cody and General Huly are -- here? Oh, there they are. Good. Good! (Laughter.) Thank goodness you're here. (Laughter.) They will brief in a few moments on the details of the alerts and the deployment orders that have been issued, but let me first say a few words about the principles that have guided us as we've planned these force rotations over the past period of months.

When we began the mobilization process for Operation Iraqi Freedom, we saw that the system was, in large measure, broken. It was not sufficiently respectful of the troops, their families and their employers. In the months since, we've been working hard to fix it. We've made progress, but we still have a way to go.

In this force rotation, we've tried to give people the longest notice possible, so that they will -- that they, their families, their employers will have some time to prepare.

We've tried to limit tours. The goal is to have Army mobilizations of up to a maximum of 18 months, including accrued leave -- that is to say, leave is part of that, up to a maximum of 18 months -- with up to a maximum of 12 months' boots on the ground in Iraq, and Marine mobilizations of up to 12

months, with up to seven months' boots on the ground in Iraq.

By earlier notifications, we've tried to provide additional time for training up. We're trying to arrange it so that the transition in country does not happen all at once and instead will be staggered, to some extent, with sufficient overlap so that there can be a transfer of relationships and so that the situational awareness of the forces on the ground is passed on to their replacements.

We've tried to ensure that the number of people who have been recently mobilized is as small as possible and that as many of the forces as possible that are remobilized or extended -- either one -- are in fact volunteers.

Of course, the system is still not perfect. There will be units with unique capabilities that will have to be remobilized or extended, including a small number that may be in the process of demobilizing. Some of the units being notified will have several months to prepare before they receive mobilization orders, while others will receive those orders soon.

But while there will be imperfections along the way, the services have made every effort to ensure that the Guard and Reserve forces are dealt with respectfully, just as each of them has demonstrated their respect and love of our country by volunteering to serve our country.

We have said on numerous occasions that the goal over time is to hand increasing responsibility for security and governance in Iraq to the Iraqi people. Today there are some 118,000 Iraqi security forces of various types. Iraq clearly is now the second-largest contributor of personnel to the coalition forces, after the U.S., and soon Iraqi forces will outnumber U.S. forces, and soon thereafter, they will outnumber U.S. plus coalition forces in the country.

The U.S. footprint will depend on the security situation, which is continually being reassessed by the commanders on the ground. The current plan is that if the security situation permits, to go from four divisions and 17 brigades in Iraq today to three divisions and 13 brigades U.S. next year. If that's possible given the security situation, and we don't know that it will be, as we do so the composition of U.S. forces rotating into the country will also change.

And I think it's important to recognize that numbers do not necessarily equate with capability. We're bringing in forces that are appropriate to deal with the evolving threats in Iraq today, including more mobile infantry elements. So while the number of U.S. forces may be level or decline slightly, this much is certain: the overall capability of the security forces in Iraq will increase. Moreover, as the number of Iraqi forces continues to increase and as other countries consider deployments, as they are, the total number of coalition forces, including Iraqi security forces, clearly will grow, as it has been growing every month for the past three or four months.

We thank the courageous men and women who wear our country's uniform. Whether they are active, Guard or Reserve, each of them sacrifices for the country. So do their families who worry about them and endure separations for long periods. Their mission in Iraq is critically important to our country, our security and our freedom. Our country is blessed to have so many fine young people who are willing to volunteer to put their country ahead of themselves.

General Myers.

Myers: Thank you, Mr. Secretary and good afternoon.

As the secretary said, you'll be given a full briefing on the Iraq and Afghanistan force rotation plan following this brief.

This plan is fully rooted in the operational assessments of our commanders on the ground. And I think both the secretary and I and the Joint Chiefs of Staff have full faith and confidence in their force requirement assessments. We met with all the service chiefs and vetted the requirements with our capabilities very thoroughly, and we believe this plan is a workable one and one which sustains our

commitment to the Iraqi people, to the coalition and to the requirements that General Abizaid outlined in his assessment. And you're going to get the details, as the secretary said, from this group over here, which also includes, among others, the chief of the National Guard Bureau.

Now I'd like to take a moment just to update you on a few items. I just returned from a trip to the United Kingdom yesterday, where I met with my counterpart, General Sir Michael Walker, the chief of defense staff. I discussed overall NATO issues and bilateral security issues. For sure, I expressed our appreciation for the U.K.'s significant past and ongoing participation in the war on terrorism, and to the coalition in Iraq and Afghanistan. We also discussed, among other things, the potential for NATO involvement in future operations on the war on terrorism, particularly in Afghanistan. The meetings proved very useful and underscored the importance of our coalition partners, and in particular, our ally in Great Britain.

As I was embarking for the plane on Sunday morning, I received the initial details of the attack on one of our helicopters in the Fallujah area of Iraq. And my deepest condolences go out to the families of the service men and women killed and injured in that particular attack.

I also want to acknowledge that during the same weekend, in the immediate days following the attack on the Chinook, several other service members were also killed or wounded due to various rocket, mortar and explosive attacks in various locations around Iraq. As the secretary said, these people are all heroes whom we honor, and whose families we offer our prayers and our condolences.

These attacks against the coalition are examples of the very real danger we face from the former regime loyalists, extremists, and other criminal groups in Iraq who continue to use such attacks against the coalition and Iraqis in an effort to create instability. And it also emphasizes the importance of our resolve to follow through with our mission. And our troops are doing just that.

To that end, coalition forces conducted four offensive operations in the past 24 hours, to include more than 20 raids and 1,800 patrols around Iraq. In the course of these raids, they uncovered multiple weapons caches in Iraq, to include a couple of SAM launchers, the man-portable SAM launchers; nearly 300 120mm mortar rounds, 70 60mm mortar rounds, and some 60 RPG rounds.

In one of these raids, the 1st Armored Division was assisted by a local sheik who led the soldiers to a couple of different sites. In another raid, a young Iraqi man turned in 16 SA-7 anti-aircraft missile components. And Iraqis are not the only ones assisting our forces in uncovering weapons. They are assuming more and more responsibility for their own security, as the secretary said, in police and facility protection roles as well. The third Iraqi Civil Defense Corps, for example, is currently training a new class of 165 recruits. And tomorrow we'll graduate our first class of 46 Iraqi police servicemen at a Police Academy in Al-Ramadi.

The total number of Iraqi security forces, as the secretary says, now exceeds 118,000. And I think people are sort of a little bit surprised that it has gone up fairly significant here in a fairly short period of time. I think this is due largely to the fact that all of the Iraqi security force programs are now up and running and they're paying decent wages, which in turn has led to an increase in successful recruiting. And I think that's why the numbers are going up as they are.

And so, with that, we'll take your questions.

Q: Mr. Secretary, General Myers, Reserve and Guard forces have been relied on heavily in keeping adequate troop levels in Iraq. Could you tell me what concerns you have about whether too much stress has been put on U.S. Guard -- Reserve and National Guard troops, and on the possible negative effects on attracting more in the future and keeping existing troops?

Rumsfeld: These young men and women of the Guard and Reserve are doing an absolutely superb job for the country. They're doing the job that they -- each one of them volunteered to do and signed up to do.

We look at the kinds of indicators that give us clues as to how the treatment of Guard and Reserve is affecting their decisions with respect to retention or recruitment. And at the moment, the latest reports on recruiting and retention are positive. That is to say, we do not see at the moment that the situation in Iraq or Afghanistan or the general level of tempo that's taking place around the world is adversely affecting those indicators.

That is not to say that it couldn't. My guess is there's a lag in these things. And one has to anticipate, rather than wait until you see the downturn, because then, it takes a while for that to continue. Even though you make corrections, it's going to continue downward if that were to happen.

So, we're very sensitive to it. We're doing everything we can to see that they are treated properly. And fortunately, in looking at the numbers of them that are currently and prospectively being asked to serve in Iraq or Afghanistan, the overwhelming majority of the operation in Iraqi Freedom II, which is the rotation that would go in next year -- just a very small fraction of those people have been called up in the last six years, it's my understanding. So, the -- in individual situations, where you're -- with skill sets that are in short supply, you find that they are overused. The broad, general population of the Guard and Reserve tend not to be.

The other wonderful thing is we've been so fortunate to have so many volunteers in the Guard and Reserve; people who have said we'd like to go.

Dick, do you want to comment?

Myers: Just a couple of things that -- obviously, the armed forces of the United States of America are structured around using the Reserve component. I mean, we can't go to war, to conflict without them. So that obviously -- and as the secretary has said on earlier occasions, other occasions, we've got to look at our balance between the Reserve and the active and so forth and so forth. So we've got to use the Reserves. I mean, they're just absolutely essential to our warfighting capability. And they do an extraordinary job.

What the secretary has been working on very hard along with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and others is to provide as much predictability in their lives, which is probably the single biggest factor to the Reserve component, they would tell you, because they have more complex family and employer situations than the active. And the other thing -- and you might want to ask the chief of the Guard Bureau here in just a minute -- about how we're trying to modify the mobilization process and the demobilization process to take it out of the Industrial Age, for which it was designed, and try to make it more accommodating to today's needs, and that's being done as well.

Rumsfeld: Yes?

Q: Mr. Secretary --

Q: I don't think I heard either of you gentlemen say what you have said in the past and what the president has said, is that the attacks against America troops in Iraq are a reflection of the coalition's success, and that the attackers are attacking coalition success. But my question is, have you changed your view on that? Is there anything new that you can point to that U.S. troops are able to do to try and detect and stop attacks? And why do you think the number of attacks is going up and the sophistication is going up?

Rumsfeld: Phew! What was that, four or five questions? (Laughter.) Five. Put it at five. I just wanted to -- I need some help counting here.

Q: I'm going on vacation, okay, so I'm banking them-- (Laughter.)

Rumsfeld: I'll take one of them. The -- it really would be helpful if people would ask a question instead of so many pieces, because then it all has to be backtracked and untangled and --

Q: I have only one, Mr. Secretary. (Laughter.)

Q: With four parts. (Laughter.)

Rumsfeld: The -- (Laughs.) -- the point that was made by those who talked about targeting success was the reality that if one looks at the pattern, we find that, for example, the numbers of police that are being produced by the police academies in various locations is something that is, we believe, a good thing for the country. And it's a growing number. And one of the attacks took place at a graduation ceremony at a police academy. One wonders if that's a signal, an attempted signal by the Ba'athists to Iraqis, you know, don't enable that to be successful. Don't enable this development of Iraqi security forces where Iraqis are being hired, recruited, trained, put out in the street to provide for their own country's security.

Another thing that was important, we believe, was the development of a governing council. And of course they -- and there are some women serving on it, and one of the women was killed by Ba'athist regime remnants. The United Nations decided to come in, and brought a team of people in, and the attack was against the U.N. building. So, there are those types of things that -- I don't know how you would characterize them; they are signs of progress, they're signs of improvements in the circumstances, and they seem to be periodically targeted by the Ba'athists. That's what that had to do with.

(To General Myers.) Do you want to respond to one or more of her other --

Myers: I will try -- I will try maybe one or more, but I'll answer it this way and see if I hit them, Barbara.

First of all, one of the things that has not changed very much is the area that these -- most of these attacks still occur in. So, that is a constant. They will change their tactics and their techniques and their procedures based on our changing; our tactical -- changing its tactics, techniques and procedures. Part of that is what you're seeing is as we're successfully against a certain adversary tactic, they'll change that tactic to try to be more effective. Some of that sophistication may be due to help from outside Iraq. It's not entirely clear yet. And so, we'll just have to keep working that.

And what else did you ask?

Rumsfeld: No, don't. No, let's go somewhere else.

Yes?

Q: Mr. Secretary, as you know, there are many vocal members of Congress calling for more U.S. boots on the ground in Iraq, including Senator McCain, who says that more U.S. troops are needed to launch an effective counterinsurgency campaign, and especially in the wake of these increased attacks as of late. How do you respond to that now that you are drawing down the number of U.S. troops, even though perhaps the capability is changing?

Rumsfeld: Just so we get a fix on the number of U.S. troops, the number of U.S. troops is a portion of the total troops in the country, the other elements being coalition forces and Iraqis. And the number --

Q: (Off mike.) -- my question --

Rumsfeld: Shh-shh! The total number of troops, security forces in the country, is going up steadily. It has been for four months.

Second, I don't know that there are "many" members of Congress -- I hear a few. There's 535 members of the House and Senate. And I have not seen anything approximating a large number of them doing what you've said they're doing.

Senator McCain is a senior member of the Armed Services Committee and has a distinguished military record. And needless to say, when he makes recommendations, people think about them and consider them and discuss them. We had discussions this morning on that very subject. (Aside.) Just a minute. We talked to General Sanchez, and he and General Abizaid have been meeting with all of the commanders. And I do not -- I have not been told of a single military commander in CENTCOM, in Iraq, who is recommending additional U.S. military forces; not one.

Now if General Sanchez and General Abizaid came to General Myers and said, "We believe we need additional U.S. forces," and General Myers came to me, we would go to the president and we would recommend additional U.S. forces. No one has recommended that. And there are a lot of good reasons why they don't. They believe that it is important to have Iraqis take increasing responsibility. The Iraqis admittedly don't have the training our forces do. They tend not to have the equipment our forces do. They tend not to have the experience our forces do.

On the other hand, they do speak the language, they do live in the neighborhood, they do have situational awareness, which is different from someone who's in from another country. And the progress that's been made with joint patrols has been impressive.

Do you want to add anything just to this?

Myers: The only thing I would add is that as you think about the security situation in this very complex environment, that it -- as the secretary said earlier, that numbers do not equate to capabilities.

For instance, the Stryker Brigade that is on its way, as we speak, to Iraq will be a very effective unit because of the way it's structured. It's a very modern structure that the Army has devised for that brigade and the ones that follow it, up to six, I think, eventually, perhaps, if the secretary approves all those. And that's going to help.

And the way we're structuring these forces that are going in is different than the way we structured the forces that are in there now. For instance, we're going to have a lot more infantry. Even though we'll have armored divisions going in, they're not going to go in with all their armor, because that's not what the need is right now. So their capabilities will not equate the capabilities -- in fact, we think they'll be superior. And that's part of the answer.

The other part of the answer is that you just can't carve out the security piece and say more forces are going to help -- in my view, more forces are going to help us with the problem of making progress in Iraq like we want to make. There are several other things that have to come along simultaneously. The governance piece has to come along very well. The economy, the infrastructure and, probably just as importantly, how you communicate where we're headed to the Iraqi people, to the region, to the world -- those are all pieces of it. And so it doesn't come down to -- it's just impossible to boil it down to numbers.

Q: I guess my question -- just to follow up, my question --

Rumsfeld: Just a minute, please. The other thing Senator McCain said which I think is important to consider is that he said something to the effect that we do not want to send a message that America's exit from Iraq is more important than the achievement of our goals. And I think that's a good point. We don't.

And it's important that as we increase Iraqi security forces, that we don't leave the impression -- and goodness knows, I don't know how the president or I or General Myers or anyone else could be more explicit than saying that we intend to see this through. The president is solid as a rock on this. And the task is not to find a way to leave the country precipitously; and rather the task is to see how, at what pace, we're able to see the Iraqi people take over responsibilities for their essential services, take over responsibility for the governance of the country and take over responsibilities for the security of the country. And that should be done at as rapid a rate as is possible, and it should not be done at a rate that

is so rapid that it's not possible. And that is a -- those are a tough set of issues, and it's perfectly proper for people to debate that and discuss it and consider that as to how that can best be done.

Q: (Off mike.) -- Speaking of Senator McCain, today the Pentagon agreed to a proposal on tankers that would allow the Air Force to buy 20 and lease 80. This is six months after the Pentagon proposed a 100-lease proposal. My question is, why did the Pentagon agree to this compromise now only a few months after you put in that earlier proposal? What impact did a lot of the congressional criticism of the earlier proposal have on accepting a compromise?

Rumsfeld: Well, you know, life in this town is built on compromise. And the marbles were divided by the founders of this country in the Constitution, and they said there will be an executive and a legislative and a judicial branch and each will have certain responsibilities. Clearly there were significant individual members of the United States Congress who felt that there were better ways to approach this. And, thanks to them and to the work that Paul Wolfowitz has done and others in the executive branch and Senator Warner, it looks as though there may be an understanding that's been reached that is acceptable to all parties. And compromise takes place all the time.

Q: Are you happy with the compromise or are you begrudgingly accepting it?

Rumsfeld: Look. If the senior people who address these issues in the department have agreed to it with the key members of the House and Senate and the Office of Management and Budget, then it seems to me that's what we ought to be doing, is finding a way forward.

Yes?

Q: Mr. Secretary, could you comment on the published and broadcast reports that have suggested that the U.S., the Pentagon particularly, might have missed an opportunity before the war to avert war, an overture from the Iraqi intelligence chief? And --

Rumsfeld: I can't --

Q: -- (Inaudible.) -- question for General Myers?

Rumsfeld: I can't, because I'm without knowledge of all that except what's been in the press. And my understanding is, I was told before I came down here, that the Central Intelligence Agency has responded to it forcefully, I think the word was "robustly," if there is such a word.

Q: Well, can I ask --

Rumsfeld: Just a minute. Just a minute.

I would add that the regime of Saddam Hussein had ample, well beyond ample, opportunities to avoid war. There were something like 18, ultimately 18 U.N. resolutions. There was a declaration where they had the opportunity. The president gave a last chance ultimatum.

So the idea that there was some scrap of information it was -- as I say, I don't know what it was, but -- other than what's been reported. But clearly, the CIA considered it and dealt with it in a way that they felt was appropriate.

Q: Well, General Myers, could you just comment on -- you mentioned the --

Rumsfeld: Why don't we -- why don't we try to move around the room a little bit?

Q: I just want to clarify this --

Rumsfeld: But it's -- time's almost up, Jamie. You wouldn't want to do that.

Q: Just a quick question.

Rumsfeld: You wouldn't do that to your friends -- to Bob.

Q: The criticism about the Iraqi security forces is that they're not nearly as well equipped as the United States to go after the insurgents, and that many of them are -- they don't have any -- they don't have any equipment or any -- very little capability. Can you just address that?

Myers: You bet. There are --

Q: Senator McCain yesterday accused you of sort cooking the books on this issue.

Myers: Well, I haven't heard his comments.

But what we have are five or six levels of Iraqi security forces, and they're not all equal. The Iraqi police, right now numbering 60,000-plus, are in some cases, but it's a fraction, are very well trained and equipped. Others have to be trained and equipped. And the good news about the supplemental is that it has resources in there for that.

When you look at Facilities Protection Service, those folks are guarding sites and infrastructure, and their training does not need to be as robust as the police or the new Iraqi army, which is probably the part of that security apparatus that's going to need the most training and the most equipping. That will be, per person, the most expensive piece of it. Iraqi Civil Defense Corps fits somewhere in between.

But it's certainly our obligation, and the obligation of the Governing Council and the ministries that are stood up, not to send Iraqis out to do tasks for which they're not properly organized, trained and equipped. So, the supplemental is going to help us in that regard.

But there -- it is uneven, depending on who you're talking -- what part of the force you're --

Q: Of the 118,000, how many of them are actually able to go out and --

Myers: They all fulfill very, very important functions. The person that's guarding infrastructure, let's say it's pipeline security, and let's say you've armed them -- and I'm -- this is hypothetical. Let's say you've just armed them with a radio where they can report intrusion, where somebody else, a more competent force, can come in take -- deal with the situation. That is a very valuable thing, we think. And that doesn't mean you need to have a full-up Special Forces-qualified person guarding the pipeline. You need somebody that can report the incidents, can take the ones that are easily deterred and move them away, and those that are more determined, call in -- have the ability to call in forces. So it's that kind of structure, and we're trying to do that in a way that's very responsible inside Iraq.

Rumsfeld: Last question.

Q: Mr. Secretary, as you put together this troop rotation plan, what assumptions did you make about how long you will continue to have the two multinational divisions next year and the overall level of coalition contributions -- troop contributions.

Rumsfeld: You're going to get the experts briefing you in a few minutes on these questions. My recollection is that it -- the assumption is that there would be two international divisions, as there currently are, and that we stand ready to have additional international forces, which then could either comprise a -- there's no assumption on this -- they could then comprise a separate division or a portion of a division, in which case then there would be fewer U.S. or other coalition forces that they'd be replaced by, unless the security situation on the ground called for additional forces, in which case, everyone would go up.

Thank you very much.

Q: (Inaudible.) -- sir? Please, sir, please!

Q: Why didn't the Chinooks have all the defensive equipment that they needed and had requested?

Rumsfeld: That helicopter had them.

Myers: Yeah, those -- that helicopter had them.

Q: Had everything? Had all its up-to-date equipment? Because we're hearing from families of those who were aboard that they had not.

Myers: That's our understanding. (Inaudible.)

Q: (Inaudible.)

Myers: No, my understanding is they did -- (Inaudible.)

Q: Was it operational?

Q: But they had to be -- (Inaudible.)

Q: (Inaudible.)

Q: (Inaudible.) -- General.

Myers: As far as we know.

Q: So as far you know, it was operational?

Myers: Far as we know, yes.

Q: Okay.

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