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Presenter: Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld Tuesday, December 23, 2003 1:04 p.m. EST

Defense Department Operational Update Briefing

(Participating; Gen. Richard Myers, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff)

Gen. Myers (?): We've been walking for -- (inaudible.)

Sec. Rumsfeld: We're here! (Laughter.) (Laughs.) What a jaunt!

Q: This doesn't mean less briefings though, right?

Sec. Rumsfeld: No! Whatever. (Laughter.)

Q: Get one of those electric cars.

Sec. Rumsfeld: (Laughs.)

Well, good afternoon. This is -- I like to know what's behind me -- this is the first briefing we've had here in this new studio. It looks about the same. Some of the faces are the same, I see.

The holidays are upon us, and that certainly is a time to give thanks for our country's many blessings. And there's no greater blessing than the courage of the young men and women who wear our country's uniform. They are all volunteers. They willingly put their lives at risk so that all Americans can live in peace and freedom.

Sunday's announcement that Time Magazine has named the men and women of America's armed forces as the 2003 Person of the Year is a wonderful and certainly a well-deserved recognition of their remarkable achievements, and there have been many. At this time last year, a vicious dictator ruled Iraq. He was a man who took pleasure in having dozens of people thrown off the tops of several-story buildings to their death; whose security apparatus tortured innocent men, women and children; and who murdered literally hundreds of thousands of people over his time in office and piled their bodies in mass graves.

Today, Saddam Hussein has been removed from power. The man who terrorized a nation and who sought to terrorize the world was found cowering in a hole in the ground. Instead of a palace, he now spends his time in a prison cell, waiting for justice for his crimes. And the Iraqi people face a future not of fear, but of freedom. And that is what the armed forces have accomplished in the last 12 months alone.

Since September 11th of 2001, they have accomplished even more. They've rescued two nations; liberated some 50 million people; helped to capture or kill nearly two-thirds of the known senior al

Qaeda operatives; broken up terrorist cells, and prevented terrorist attacks on several continents. These are important achievements. Yet it is also important to remember that terrorists still threaten our country, and that we remain engaged in a dangerous and, to be sure, difficult war, and that it will not be over soon.

We also recognize the lesson of September 11th, that the only way to deal with terrorists is to take the battle to them, to hunt them down, and to capture or kill them before they can kill more innocent Americans. That is what the men and women of the armed forces are doing this day and every day. We are grateful for their courage, proud of their service, and appreciate the time they sacrifice away from their loved ones so that all Americans can live in freedom. Those who wear the country's uniform are indeed the Person of the Year every year, and God bless them all.

Dick Myers.

Gen. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Secretary, and good afternoon. As you all know, I just returned from a trip to Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Bahrain and Djibouti, where I had a great visit with our servicemen and -women. At every stop, I was able to thank them and express America's appreciation for putting their lives on the line for their country. I was able to talk to hundred of soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, DoD civilians individually and to see how they're really doing. I do talk to General Abizaid every day and see numerous reports from the field, but it takes on a whole different perspective when you get a chance to see these individuals face to face.

The troops and the families that I met in some of those countries are doing just great. They look sharp; many inspection-ready, just as sharp as the day they left the United States for their mission overseas. They're confident, and they fully understand the mission and how important it is to our defense.

And just as important to our national security are the servicemen and -women who are stationed throughout the United States supporting what we can Operation Noble Eagle. Many of those are away from home as well.

Operation Noble Eagle, as you may recall, is the official name that was given to the mission of homeland defense in September of 2001. We don't talk about it as often, but Operation Noble Eagle continues and takes on an added sense of urgency this week with the increase in the terror alert.

As you know, Northern Command was stood up just over one year ago for this very purpose of homeland security. We're taking this threat very seriously and have put in place several added security measures. Since 9/11, the U.S. military has scrambled fighters and vectored air patrols more than 1,600 times to respond to potential air threats, and have combined with AWACS and air refueling tankers to fly more than 32,000 sorties in this Operation Noble Eagle mission.

Americans may see similar security precautions over the holidays. And without talking specifically, they may see additional air patrols over select cities and facilities; an increase in the air defense posture here in Washington, D.C.; and combat aircraft could be put on a higher alert at different air bases throughout the country. We have dedicated people and resources available to protect our citizens, and we are taking some of those precautions today.

Let me also say, along with the secretary, something about the Time Magazine cover honoring the American soldier. I'm delighted that Time chose to recognize these men and women. The three soldiers on the cover represent every soldier, sailor, airmen, Marine, and Coast Guardsman serving in our armed forces. Whether they are active duty, whether they're reserve, whether they're part of the National Guard, today's servicemembers are indeed America's best.

And with that, we'll take your questions.

Q: Mr. Secretary, General Myers, will the Department of Defense discontinue the policy of mandatory anthrax vaccines for servicemembers and allow those who have been disciplined for refusing

to take them to have their cases reconsidered? And also, what's your response to the judge's suggestion that the Pentagon has used troops as Guinea pigs for an experimental drug?

Sec. Rumsfeld: The decision is recent. The lawyers are examining it. And at the appropriate time, they will be making a recommendation as to the way forward. I don't want to comment on any of the specifics in your question or seem to agree with them, because I think that we'll just leave it that the lawyers are going to look at it; they're going to recommend a way forward, and then the department will proceed on the basis of their recommendations very likely.

The only kind of thing I would say in addition is, obviously the comment that you quoted, if in fact the judge said it, is inaccurate.

Q: Mr. Secretary --

Gen. Myers: Could I just --

Sec. Rumsfeld: And I've not read the decision, so I'm not going to --

Q: (Inaudible) -- the decision.

Gen. Myers: Could I --

Sec. Rumsfeld: Yeah.

Gen. Myers: -- pile on just a second? This drug that we're using, the vaccine has been around for 40 years. It is not experimental. It's approved by the FDA. And from a military standpoint, I think it's extremely important. As you know, when we went into Iraq, we had all the troops in their chemical protective gear, because we thought there was a very real threat of either chemical or biological weapons, and in particular, anthrax was a big worry.

It's still a worry in many parts of the world. And the one thing you can do to protect people is this vaccine. As the secretary said, the courts are going to have to figure this out. It will become probably a legal matter to some degree. But from a military standpoint, I think it's very important we have this capability to protect our troops and enable them to do their job.

Q: Mr. Secretary --

Sec. Rumsfeld: And I've had the shots, so it's not as though anyone's in --

Gen. Myers: And I've had the shots.

Q: Mr. Secretary, Time Magazine also said that perhaps you may have changed your mind about increasing troop strength, particularly in the Army, perhaps adding two more divisions or 20,000 soldiers. Up until this article, you and General Myers and others have been almost adamantly opposed to increasing the end strength, saying that we don't need any more U.S. troops in Iraq or Afghanistan. Have you really changed your mind, or are you just bowing to the Congress?

Sec. Rumsfeld: (Laughs.) You know, you could take that question and parse it and point out how imperfect it was. (Laughter.) But I would not want to do that right before the holidays. I think that would be wrong.

Q: Thank you, sir.

Sec. Rumsfeld: And I want to be gracious to you, even though it's obviously a question that can't be answered quite the way you put it. I always listen to the Congress, so nothing's changed there. If it -- I've not read the magazine, so if in fact it says what you've said it said, namely that I've changed my

mind, that would be inaccurate also.

Where I am is exactly where I have been, and that is that we -- that is to say, the department -- will continue to study the question of stress on the force and end strength. We do it systematically; we do it seriously; and we do it because we recognize how critically important it is to be able to attract and retain the men and women we need to see that this country is safe and secure.

We have no analytical work or studies that suggest that end strength should be either increased or decreased. It is perfectly proper for individuals to opine on that absent any analytical work or any justification, because people can say what they wish to say. It is not responsible for us to opine on that absent analytical work or justification.

So, instead of opining, what we have been doing is analyzing the situation and looking for a variety of ways -- we now have our services and others working on some 35, 40 different ways that stress can be reduced on the force. We've managed to get the Congress to cooperate and pass legislation on a new personnel system that should enable us to reduce some stress on the force. I met today with one of our senior officials in the department who has just this week or this month returned some 300 people to the uniformed service who had been performing functions that were not needed to be performed by military people. And he estimates that he'll have another 300 in very short order ready to be returned to the services.

So what we're doing is finding ways to increase end strength, that is to say, increase the total number of men and women in uniform available for activities that require men and women in uniform without, in fact, increasing overall end strength. And where we will be in the future is we will be wherever we have to be. If facts determine that we need to increase end strength, we will, needless to say, make a recommendation to the President and Congress and do it. If that is not the case, we will not do it. And in the meantime, we'll do a lot of things to systematically reduce the stress on the force, because we have to worry not just about today, where our recruiting and retention goals are for the most part being met; we have to worry about six months, eight months, 12 months, 18 months out, because it takes that kind of time to arrange yourself so that you have the appropriate number of folks ready to do the military assignments for our country.

Q: In your Christmas --

Q: And a follow up please.

Q: In your Christmas magnanimity, may I just then kind of recapitulate? So if I understand you

--

Sec. Rumsfeld: You want to just start with an apology for the question? (Laughter.)

Q: (Inaudible) -- to apologize, certainly. In my Christmas spirit, I always want to apologize to the secretary of Defense and to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs. But as I understand you then, at the moment, no clear change from your current policy. You say you have always had the same, and you are steady. But, the bottom line is, when will these studies be codified to the point where you will know definitively whether you need to bring in more troops or not, not just from other avenues --

Sec. Rumsfeld: When we get there, we'll announce it. And what's happening is, every day, things are being done to better manage the force. And the better you manage the force, the less stress on the force. And the less stress on the force, the more likelihood that you're going to have the kind of recruiting and retention targets met that you need. It will be -- the outcome of all of that -- some of these will be false starts. They won't achieve what we thought could be achieved. So we know that. Others are achieving things, like the one I just mentioned today. I had no knowledge of that, and suddenly I find that 300 have just been returned. And that's just in one very, very small element of this department.

So good things are happening consistently because people are focusing on it, and people are elevating that issue in a way that we all recognize what needs to be done.

Q: Mr. Secretary, to follow on that. Dozens of members of Congress, the House in particular, have let it be known -- (coughs) -- excuse me, that they intent to include in the '05 budget submission, if it's not there, the addition of perhaps up to two divisions, two more Army divisions. Would it be irresponsible of them --

Sec. Rumsfeld: (Laughs.)

Q: -- to do so in the absence of the --

Sec. Rumsfeld: You didn't listen to my first answer. I just said anyone can say or recommend anything they want.

Q: You also said it would be irresponsible --

Sec. Rumsfeld: For us. No, for us.

Q: Okay.

Sec. Rumsfeld: You should listen more carefully. Really, I'm terribly worried you're going to go off to vacation with a misunderstanding here. (Laughter.)

Q: I don't get any vacation.

Sec. Rumsfeld: Well, I did not say what you said I said. I said that it -- that we are the ones that have the obligation of making recommendations and justifying them and demonstrating why the taxpayers' dollars ought to or ought not to be used in a certain way. That's our job. Others ought to be probing and pushing and challenging and testing and opining, and that's fine. I was very clear on that, I thought. I'm just terribly disappointed that you -- (laughter.)

Q: Sorry.

Sec. Rumsfeld: Yes.

Q: For both of you gentlemen, if we could go back to Code Orange for a minute.

Sec. Rumsfeld: That's Homeland Security Department. You're in the wrong pew. (Laughter.)

Q: Well, General Myers certainly discussed it.

Q: You're a member of the Homeland Security Council, sir.

Sec. Rumsfeld: True. (Laughter.) I apologize. (Laughter.)

Q: Thank you. So do I. (Laughter.)

Q: Is this tit-for-tat, Mr. Secretary?

Q: Well, presuming that neither of you can discuss specific intelligence, nonetheless, can you offer, in the holiday season here, the American people and American troops your perspective so people can better understand, is this Code Orange that you've discussed from the podium today truly serious? Is this -- is there something that you can say to put into perspective how serious you view this?

And General Myers, if I was understanding you particularly, you spoke only of air defense being increased over Washington. Literally, is that accurate, sir? Is it only over Washington, or should we assume other places as well? Can you explain why only over Washington? It raises an interesting

question, of course.

Gen. Myers: I'll take the last part first, I think, and leave the intel' to the secretary. No, what I said was that we -- I gave you some examples of steps that we could take. I mentioned the National Capital region, where we could increase the air defense here. I also talked about air defense over other cities and critical infrastructure sites throughout the country.

Q: I --

Gen. Myers: And so if people looked up and saw more combat air patrols, then that would be -- so no-- it's more broad.

Sec. Rumsfeld: I'd just make a quick comment. A elevated alert level or force protection level costs money. It costs money for the federal government. It costs money for the state and local governments.

Second, it imposes a stress on people involved; that is to say, the United States military, other federal agencies, state governments, local governments. Any time you are asked to do things that you do not normally do in a lower threat level or a lower force protection level, it costs money, and it causes stress on military and civilian at all levels of government.

Therefore, you do not do it lightly. You ask: Is it serious? Yes, you bet your life. People don't do that unless it's a serious situation.

Q: But perhaps people are confused because then you hear, you know, high-level government officials, the president on down, saying, "But Americans, of course, should go about their business over the holiday season." What's your perspective on all of this? Help people understand.

Sec. Rumsfeld: Right. Well, I think the president said it exactly correctly, and I don't know that it needs a lot of amplification from me. Reasonable people, at -- in various departments and agencies, look at the intelligence information and make recommendations in the Homeland Security Council and then to the president as to what kinds of homeland security announcements ought to be made. And they do it recognizing the cost, they do it recognizing the stress, and they do it recognizing that the American people hear it and then have to know how to behave off of it.

And if there were a perfect way to say to the American people, "Do this, A, B, C, and don't do that, A, B and C," they would do so.

Obviously, when you have these kinds of pieces of information, you look at them. They're imprecise. They're imperfect. But at some point, when you're trying to connect the dots before the fact, you come to a conclusion -- the appropriate people do, not this department, in this case -- they come to a conclusion that it's important to send information to state and local governments and other federal agencies, of a specific nature, to behave in specific way and to raise these force protection levels and threat levels.

And they say simultaneously to the American people and another audience who hears that -- they hear these threat levels being changed -- that we're doing it because we believe we have good reason to do it. And to the extent that people can be protected from terrorist threats, your federal government, your state government, your local government are doing the things that we believe are appropriate, given the threat level. So that's -- that's what it is.

By the same token, we're free people. We shouldn't sit around, you know, hiding under chairs and hoping it would go away. We have to live our lives. And that's what we'll all do. And that's precisely what the president suggested.

Q: Mr. Secretary?

Sec. Rumsfeld: Yes.

Q: Acknowledging that prosecuting the war on terror doesn't lend itself to the sort of year-end analysis the media likes to go through, I'd like to have you recall where you were a year ago and what you were talking about a year ago. Fewer than half the al Qaeda operatives, according to the statistics released here, were captured, Saddam was still a threat, there was a building military posture -- the U.S. and coalition partners -- to confront Saddam. Now in the briefing today, two-thirds of the al Qaeda operatives captured, Saddam out of power, yet the United States is in a higher threat level. Can you explain to the American people how the war on terror is different now than it was a year ago, the key milestones of success, and what may be facing the American people in the future?

Sec. Rumsfeld: Well, I touched on that in my opening remarks. The global war on terror is not something that is going to end precipitously, and it's not going to end with a surrender on the USS Missouri; it is a war that is -- where we have no choice but to go after the terrorists where they are. Terrorism is not something that you can defend against in your homeland and think that they're not going to bother you. They did bother us; they killed 3,000 people. They are bothering us now with threats that suggest that we needed to elevate the threat levels.

Our choice is the only choice, and that -- if we want to live as free people, we simply have to find the terrorists where they are and capture or kill them and break up the terrorist networks and dry up their funding. And we have moved through the past 12 months and made notable, specific progress in a variety of ways. And not to suggest that it's over: it isn't. It will continue for some period into the future. But the cooperation between some 90 nations, the cooperation between all elements of national power, public and private, across the span of the federal government to address the threat in each of its manifestations, whether it's financing or whether it's law enforcement cooperation, or whether it's a specific attack against an individual or a group of individuals, all of those things need to be done. And the reality is that there are still terrorists out there, and they are still issuing threats in ways that cause us to make the kinds of announcements that were made this past weekend.

Q: As a follow-up, sir, you would clearly assert that the Iraqi are safer that Saddam is gone. How, specifically, are the American people safer?

Sec. Rumsfeld: The American people are safer because of the coalition that's been put together, the cooperation in sharing law enforcement information, the cooperation in squeezing off finances. There's no question but that there're any number of terrorist acts that were stopped prior to their actually occurring. We know that. And the pressure that is being put on today, on terrorists in a variety of locations, is something that makes it that much harder for people to do what they do. It's harder for them to raise money, it's harder for them to move across a border, it's harder for them to communicate with each other. It is harder for them to assemble. And all of that advantages those of us who do not believe that killing innocent men, women and children is a good thing.

General Myers?

Pam.

Q: I'd like to indulge your holiday spirit on a question, since I'm not sure you'll like this one. There is a recently --

Sec. Rumsfeld: (inaudible).

Q: Yes, sir. A recently declassified memo -- 20 years ago, the use of chemical against Iranians and Kurds, it wasn't sufficient to sever ties with Iraq. And indeed the United States government was trying to improve that relationship, and you played a role in that. They asked you to go over and talk to Saddam Hussein about a couple of issues. Twenty years later, the same use of those weapons in those same instances was one of the main reasons cited for going to war.

So you played a role, a central role, in each one of these and I'm wondering of you could explain to people who might look at that cynically and say, Exactly how much of this humanitarian outrage for what happened to the Kurds can we believe here --

Sec. Rumsfeld: Well --

Q: -- if 20 years later, it only got acted on.

Sec. Rumsfeld: I am told that a newspaper printed something out of the archives; I've not seen it. It --

Q: It's a memo from Shultz -- I think it's (to you ?).

Sec. Rumsfeld: It's apparently a memo or something from then- Secretary of State George Shultz. I don't know if it was to me or not, but someone said it was to somebody else, saying that he should be given instructions to do something, which would mean it was not necessarily to me. It may have been --

Q: It's not the memo I'm asking about --

Sec. Rumsfeld: Well, I know, but you've raised it here for the world to see and I thought I might have my time to answer it.

In any event, I don't know that I ever saw it. But to put it into context, the Iraqis were using chemicals and the United States had taken a very strong position against their using chemical weapons.

That is to say, the government of our country was quite publicly opposed to the use of those weapons. They were opposed publicly, and they were opposed privately. And if one brings it fast forward, 20- plus years later, and looks around the world and thinks of the countries that are doing things we don't like today, we do two things simultaneously. We publicly and privately tell them we don't like what they're doing -- as we do North Korea, as we have Libya -- but we simultaneously may very well have interaction with them at one level or another: through the Department of State, through the Department of Defense, through private parties from time to time. And so, you'll see a situation where there's a country that is not behaving as we would like them to behave and not behaving the way we behave. But we nonetheless either have diplomatic relations, or we have diplomatic interaction with them, and communicate on a variety of subjects. That is, there's nothing unusual about that then, there is certainly nothing unusual about it today. We are doing it today in a number of instances. And one ought not to be surprised about that. And the only surprise, really, was that someone reached down into a duffle bag, 20 years old, and pulled that out and pretended surprise.

Q: How did you find Saddam Hussein --

Q: I don't that it's some -- I don't know that it's so much surprise, but I sense that -- I guess there's continuing questions about why the war. And you've answered that a gazillion times, so you don't need to go into that again. But it sort of -- it feeds one part of society's sense that there's a lot more to this war than was stated, or maybe a lot less.

Sec. Rumsfeld: That would be a misunderstanding.

Q: How did you find Saddam Hussein when you met with him 20 years ago?

Sec. Rumsfeld: (Pause.) We knew his address then. (Laughter.)

Q: I mean, was he --

Q: (inaudible)? (Laughter.)

Q: Are Chinese companies banned from going to bid for reconstruction contracts in Iraq, and if not, who do they ask this for, to the Coalition Authority or the Iraqis? And I have one question to General Myers --

Sec. Rumsfeld: Why don't we just do them one at a time? Let's take that one.

So everyone's clear, the United States did not ban any company from doing anything. The United States published a list of companies that it said could bid on prime contracts for funds that were provided by the American taxpayer. It did not address what the Iraqi money can be spent for, it did not address what any other of the 185 nations across this global that give money to Iraq, what their money can be spent for. It did not address subcontracts. All it did was, it published a list of countries that said those countries can bid on prime contracts for the funds that the United States taxpayer are putting up. And it left open the question on subcontracts; it left open the questions on Iraqi money and on the money that is donated by every other country on the face of the Earth.

Q: How do you dispute they're bidding the primary contract bids, oil industry and infrastructure, all the anti-war countries are not getting those?

Sec. Rumsfeld: I think I explained it perfectly. And any country can do anything that I have just said. And that's entirely up to them. It's really not complicated.

Yes?

Q: A few minutes ago, in answering the question about safety of the United States with Saddam Hussein gone, you mentioned terrorist attacks having been stopped.

Sec. Rumsfeld: Yes.

Q: Were they attacks directed inside the United States or in the Middle East?

Sec. Rumsfeld: I'd have to go back. I've got two that are in Asia -- three that are in Asia that just leapt into my mind. There have also been terrorist attacks we believe -- one can't know with certain knowledge until after the fact -- (laughs) -- but we believe that terrorists attacks in this country as well as in other countries around the world have been prevented by virtue of the fact that information came in which enabled people to do things and to behave in certain ways that dissuaded and deterred those attacks from taking place.

Yes.

Q: Did it result in any arrests, Mr. Secretary? I mean --

Sec. Rumsfeld: Yes, it has.

Q: -- are these case that are --

Sec. Rumsfeld: It has.

Q: -- that are --

Sec. Rumsfeld: I've mentioned from this podium, for example, one involving Singapore.

Q: But that's not Saddam Hussein, sir. That's more broad global war on terrorism.

Sec. Rumsfeld: Actually I was talking about the global war on terror.

Q: You mentioned domestic. You thought that there were some cases where possible terrorist

attack aimed at the United States were thwarted. I'm wondering if you could cite those examples. I just

--

Sec. Rumsfeld: I can't.

Q: Off the top of my head, I can't recall any specifically.

Sec. Rumsfeld: I say it's hard to prove them until they've happened, and then it's too late to prove that they didn't happen. So it's a difficult thing to prove a negative. There have been instances where I am persuaded that terrorist attacks in this country and in other countries didn't happen because of steps that were taken.

Q: And in light of the progress that you said is being made in the war on terrorism, specifically the progress made against al Qaeda, how is it then that al Qaeda -- because intelligence reports apparently indicate that al Qaeda may be at the center of these latest threats against the U.S. -- how is it then that al Qaeda can continue to threaten what is arguably the most powerful country in the world?

Sec. Rumsfeld: Well, because it's not hard. I mean, a -- if you think about it, the United States develops technologies that -- we make them available all across the globe. Terrorists can go take off the shelf technology that they didn't have to develop, that they didn't have the infrastructure or the inventors or the scientists or anything else to develop. But they can buy it, and they have it. So they can use 21st-century technology against the United States with relative ease.

Second, they can attack at any time, at any place, using any technique, and it's not physically possible to defend at any time in every place against every conceivable technique. It's just physically not possible, which is why it is so necessary that the battle be taken to them.

And you say, "How can a murderer murder?" All they have to do is go murder someplace, somebody. And that's how they do that. And they can do it particularly to a soft target, to an innocent man, woman or child. They can also, you know, do what they did with respect to the airplanes.

So they go to school watching what -- how people behave, select out opportunities of -- targets of opportunity and seize them. And our task is put enough pressure on them so that there are fewer of them, it's harder for them to function. But to stop that -- all of it, obviously, is not possible. We just saw what happened in several countries. Just in the last six months we've seen terrorist attacks in various countries around (sic).

So there was -- yes?

Q: Can you describe any developments you've observed in the Iraqi insurgency since Saddam's capture, any effect that Saddam's capture has had on it?

Gen. Myers: Well, a couple. One is, it's enabled us to pick up lots of former regime elements. And just yesterday we picked up 50. Twenty-nine were actually targeted, I mean, individuals we wanted. We went after them, got them. That's just one day. So we've been pretty successful at that.

I think we've gotten more insight into a little bit about structure, how the former regime elements are structured. And we've had an increase in Iraqis willing to come forward and provide information to coalition forces and to Iraqis. And that's very helpful. Same phenomena that happened after his sons were killed is happening again, which is a good sign. And it probably tells you the role that fear plays in people's minds. And so when he's gone, people are more willing to come forward. So those were, I think, three examples.

Q: How --

Sec. Rumsfeld: We'll make this the last question.

Q: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Earlier in this briefing, you saluted the American fighting man and woman for their dramatic victories in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Sizeable amounts of the military are still in both places, and this government is deeply involved in the post-combat reconstruction. As you look at those two experiences and your future plans for transforming this building, should the Pentagon reorganize how it prepares for that period after the end of major combat operations? Should there be a standing force, interagency process, something to do differently in the future?

Sec. Rumsfeld: I think there are several things that one would have to do, and in thinking it through and looking at lessons learned, certainly the combatant commanders are going to have to be prepared for a series of eventualities when major combat activity ends in a conflict and be able to shift rapidly to adjust to whatever the circumstances might be on the ground.

Second, we have to re-balance our active and our Reserve forces in a way that we have better staying power. We have very large percentages -- 60, 70, 80, 90 percentages -- of some skill sets in the Reserves, and the theory being that you only needed them when you needed them for short periods. The reality is, when need them when we need them, but we need them for longer periods. And therefore, we're going to have to move out of the active force some activities that are of less immediate need and out of the Reserve some activities that are more of immediate need, and that process is going forward apace.

Third, we may very well have to look at adding either in addition or in lieu of U.S. and/or other countries' capabilities in ways that they can contribute to the kinds of needs and circumstances that one might reasonably expect prospectively. One example is the step we took, oh, a year and a half ago to begin NATO developing a rapid response force, for example. I think personally that there is going to be a continuing need for peacekeepers of various types, and I think our country very likely would want to think through how we can help other countries develop those kinds of skills and capabilities and the ability to move peacekeepers into circumstances where they might be needed. We can make contributions there, and other countries can as well.

So I think there are a lot of things that we need to do like that.

Gen. Myers: Can I add just one to the list --

Sec. Rumsfeld: You bet.

Gen. Myers: -- and it's a little outside the department's lane, but it is harnessing efficiently all elements of our national power. And since we have such an international group that's working on the global war on terrorism, that's in Afghanistan, that's in Iraq, that we have to be able to efficiently harness other countries' elements of national power and bring those to bear with great focus, in addition to what the secretary said. So there's -- there is a lot of work, actually, to do.

Sec. Rumsfeld: Have a good holiday!

Q: Merry Christmas.

Gen. Myers: Happy holidays, everybody!

Q: Merry Christmas.

Gen. Myers: Be safe.

Sec. Rumsfeld: How do you get out of here? (Laughter.)

Q: You leave a trail of cracker crumbs, and you follow that.

Sec. Rumsfeld: Is that so? I need -- (off mike).

Gen. Myers: We ran out two miles back.

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