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# News Transcript

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**Presenter:** Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld

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## Secretary Rumsfeld Interview with Maria Ressa, CNN

**Q:** Who's winning the global war on terror now?

**A:** Well, that's a tough question. On the one hand, there is no doubt that the 80 or 90 countries that are in the coalition -- sharing intelligence, cooperating in a variety of ways to try to freeze bank accounts and to arrest people that are terrorists -- that a lot of progress is being made there. Certainly, in the central front of this global war on terrorism, in Iraq and Afghanistan, we are making excellent progress. The other side of that coin is, what's happening in terms of more terrorists coming into the various organizations and networks? Of course, there are schools that are teaching people to go out and kill innocent men, women and children. It's hard to know how many there are, if you take people. That's one thing. If you take money -- we know that we are stopping some funds that go into terrorist organizations. But you don't know that which you don't know. So you don't know if there is a lot more funding coming in, although it's pretty clear that there is a great deal of pressure on those that would finance these terrorist activities.

**Q:** Terrorist financing; you mentioned in Southeast Asia that not much has been done about it. Will the US work on some...

**A:** Well, it isn't the US. There's no one country that can do this. It takes lots of nations cooperating. It's a very difficult thing to do because the terrorist organizations are smart, and they see what happens and they move accounts, and then they start using couriers, they start using curve exchanges as opposed to official channels. But it is a lot harder today for terrorists to finance their organizations, to move money, than it used to be. It's not perfect. There are still sizeable sums of money going into terrorists, but we have to find ways to continue to expose it, continue to freeze those accounts.

**Q:** You said things are going well in Iraq.

**A:** They are.

**Q:** And yet, you are in that part of the world, particularly in the Muslim communities -- many in

Southeast Asia -- believe that that the US did the wrong thing in Iraq, and that it squandered away resources and goodwill that could be better used for Al-Qaeda. How do you respond to this sentiment about Iraq?

A: Well, you really can't. People have different views. The fact of the matter is that the Al-Qaeda network in Iraq is a serious network. It's a global network. It is increasingly active in other parts of the world. The Al-Qaeda are still active in Iraq, and as well as in other parts. So, people have different opinions and different views. But what I see is a global insurgency - a global struggle - where a small minority in that religion are attempting to hijack and to persuade people to oppose the state system in our world; to oppose civil society, to oppose free systems, not just the United States, not just the West. The attack clearly is against moderate Muslim regimes. We see terrorist attacks in this part of the world. We see terrorist attacks in the other parts of the world.

Q: There has been a lot of questioning about the intelligence that led the decisions to go into Iraq.

A: There has been.

Q: Do you think that the intelligence was correct. For example, talking about Al-Qaeda in Iraq, some critics say that Iraq has become a magnet for Al-Qaeda, after the US has gone in.

A: Well, we know, Zarqawi was there. People say well, it has never taken the oath to Osama Bin Laden. That may be, but that's a technicality, I mean, clearly Al-Zarqawi has been an affiliate with the Al-Qaeda organization. Today, it is probably more important in Iraq than the Al-Qaeda organization is. The Al-Zarqawi apparatus -- although they work together. Oh, you say, "some people say." No matter what anyone does, there's always going to be some people who say something to the contrary and of course, that's fair enough. But the intelligence never said that Al-Zarqawi was Al-Qaeda, technically. Yet anyone who watches their work together -- the behavior patterns which are similar, some of the funding which is similar -- has to admit there is not really a dime's worth of difference.

Q: What about the foreign fighters that are in Iraq now? About how many would you say are there?

A: It's tough to know. The borders are porous. We know a lot of them came in from Syria. We know some came in from Iran. The An-Alisam organization, of course, was in Iraq. It's a terrorist organization. They moved into Iran during the war, we believe, just across the border. Now they are now in large measure back into Iraq. They are closely affiliated again with Zarqawi. But "foreign terrorists." I guess, is a matter of definition. We know there were busloads coming in. They came in to assist in opposing -- to assist Zarqawi and other terrorists in the country -- in opposing the coalition countries. Trying to count the numbers is hard. We arrest a number. They come from a variety of different countries in the region.

Q: Would you say more have come in, and has Iraq become a magnet for Al-Qaeda?

A: It clearly is an area where they are focusing at the present time. There is a major effort going on right

now, because of the United States' decision to pass sovereignty to the Iraqis. We have intercepted letters where they indicated that they recognize that it will be harder for them once the Iraqis again are managing their own country. It's harder for them to run around indiscriminately killing Iraqis, which is what they have been doing. They have killed many, many, many more Iraqis than they have coalition members. It's harder for them to do that, once the Iraqis are in charge of their country. Which they will be in a matter of few weeks. So I expect to see that they will continue to put the heat on, during this period.

Q: Is the danger greater during this time period leading up to the transition?

A: Possibly. But the coalition can't get beat up on the battlefield. Our forces are capable. They are effective. They are well trained. They are well equipped. We are continuously increasing the Iraqi security forces. There are now something like 200,000 of them. The implication that the Iraqi security forces aren't very effective, I think is unfair. Over 300 of them have been killed, so it's not like they are sitting in their barracks, not fighting out there. Now, are they well equipped? No. Are they as well trained as our people? No, but they are getting better-trained everyday, and they are getting better-equipped everyday. They will have their own Iraqi chain of command, which will be important. I expect to see them increasingly taking over responsibility for security in that country.

Q: But the US won't be pulling out precipitously?

A: No, we are not going to pull out precipitously. Obviously, we are interested in seeing them in going through what is obviously a tough period, it's a rough time, and be successful at it. But it has always been rough for countries to go from a dictatorship to a representative system. It's not an easy thing to do. The United States went through tough times with riots and with conflicts. So did Germany and Japan have troubles, some of the Eastern European countries. Afghanistan has not had a perfectly smooth trip. So, if people say, "oh my goodness, this is wrong or that is wrong." If you compare it against perfection, that's true, but when did we ever have perfection on Earth?

Q: In a sense you've had to defend the united states against a lot of things that have gone wrong and you have become a lightning rod for things gone wrong. Looking back on it, do you have any regrets in attacking Iraq and the war on terror?

SecDef: You know, it's probably the first war we have had where we have to live with 24 hour news, seven days a week. We're celebrating the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Normandy this week. If you think of trying to conduct the Normandy invasion with 24 hour news, seven days a week -- with all the critics in the world watching what was happening, seeing the gliders land in the wrong place, seeing people being killed, seeing the troops stuck at the bottom of Point D'Hoque -- they would have been just blaming General Eisenhower to a fair thee well. Calling him back for congressional hearing -- second-guessing him on this, second-guessing him on that. That's the nature of the world we live in. You know, if you do something, somebody's not going to like it. Therefore you've got a choice. You can go do nothing, or you can go do something, and live with the fact that somebody's not going to like it.

Q: Looking back on it yourself when you're alone, is there anything you look back and say, "I would have liked to have done that differently?"

SecDef: Oh! There's so many things that you wish would have gone better. On the other hand, war is unpredictable. No one can predict it – never have been able to predict it. We planned for what we would do if the oil fields were set fire, as they were in Kuwait during Desert Storm. We were ready for that. What if there were refugees and internally displaced persons -- how would we manage that with food? We were ready for that. What if they blew up the bridges and flooded the marshes, or did something disastrous like that, what would we do? Would we be ready for that? What we weren't ready for, to be honest, is for their army to take their arms and disappear. To go back into their houses, and then be around unhappy, fussing, fighting, doing things after the war.

Now, life's not perfect. But twenty-five million people are free and the hospitals are open, and the clinics are open, and the schools are open and they got new textbooks. And the economy is strong. The dinar has been steady, their new currency. Now – not bad. No one reports that on CNN, however. Is life safe? You going to a major city in the world and ask if it's safe. How many people are murdered in downtown Washington? Or downtown New York, or downtown Moscow, or downtown Paris in a given year? What's being reported over and over and over again is every single thing that's not going right. It isn't perfect, it's bumpy, it's rough. Instead of reporting the fact that people are....that all of these weapon caches are taken out of the schools in Iraq, where they were. They are taken out of the hospital where they were. ....Saddam was using those facilities as military headquarters. The mass graves are not being filled up, they were under Saddam Hussein. There's so much good that happens, and yet it never makes it to the news.

Q: You're saying there's as much good as you expect?

SecDef: Oh my goodness! There's so much more good. Look at what the Iraqi people say. Look at the polls. Something like 75% or 80% are so glad that Saddam Hussein is gone. Despite the hardship, despite the difficulties, they are grateful the coalition did what they did and took out Saddam Hussein. It is like 90% with the Kurds, it's about 80 or 75% with the Shia, and it's even 50% or close to 50% with the Sunni, the ones that were benefiting during the Saddam Hussein's regime. So that's not getting reported.

Q: Within the Muslim world, there is the perception is that Iraq is being used by the radicals....?

SecDef: Of course, look what's the press is saying. Look at what Al-Jazeera is telling the Arab world. Look at what Al Alabia is telling the Arab World. Day after day after day, they are putting absolute lies on television.

Q: You're saying that this is just a perception, and the actual reality is much better than the perception?

SecDef: You go into that country, and you talk to people. Talk to the military commanders, talk to the troops, talk to the coalition forces, talk to the Iraqi people. Then go and talk to the people that are listening to television. There is an enormous disparity between the perceptions of what's going on. On

the one hand, there's confidence about the future, there is recognition of the progress they've made. Here they're developing a symphony orchestra. They are going to send teams to the Olympics, they've got a soccer team, they've got a wrestling team. On the other hand, it's hand wringing, it's everything's terrible, it's pessimism, it's all is lost. Now why is there that disparity? It's an enormous disparity. Something's wrong. Fortunately, the people have a good center of gravity. They can sift and sort, and ultimately the truth will win out.

Q: I hope you're right, sir. Let me ask you about the distrust of the United States: anti-American sentiment has increased and in this region as well as other parts of the world and that seems to have more increased after the prison scandal. Has that affected the U.S.'s ability to lead global war on terror?

SecDef: It's certainly easier when everyone agrees with you. On the other hand, we still have a coalition of some eighty or ninety nations that recognize that this isn't something that involves the United States. The countries, the state systems that the terrorists are after, are the moderate Muslim regimes. You know that. The countries they are after are Western countries. Why did they strike Bali? Why did they strike Madrid? Why did they strike Saudi Arabia? Why did they threaten all state systems? Why did they attack the United Nations in Baghdad? An organization that fashions itself an innocent. It represents the state system, and there are a minority, but a non-trivial minority of people that are determined to bring down the state system, and create a world where people are terrorized of them.

They are using terror as a weapon of choice. It seems to me that civilized people, civilized nations, people who believe in the state system and accountability, and the freedom to have countries that are different from each other, ought to recognize the threat that's posed to them. A serious threat, and understand that the very thing that makes the rest of the world productive and successful and prosperous -- think of the growth in this part of the world -- is trust among people, and terrorists strike exactly at that trust. The very thing that makes free people free, and successful and prosperous, and provides opportunities for people. Then why in the world are people flocking to go to countries that are successful?

Q: But do you think the US has the same on the moral high ground to lead a global war on terror against these terrorists?

SecDef: I think that there is a focused, precise, directed campaign against the United States in the media in parts of the world. That is unhelpful to us, but we'll survive. That is, in fact, we are what we are, and we are a country that seeks no one else's land. We attempt to impose our will on no other country. Our first choice would be to be left alone. You know Americans, they don't run around. We're not colonizers, we're not out trying to take people's resources or wealth or anything else. Ultimately, people understand that. It's interesting that people vote with their feet. Why are people lined up to come into the United States? To come and live there? To work there, and to be a part of that free system? You can say "Well, there are people who are unhappy with the United States, there are people in the press who are fussing at the United States" and that's true. But on the other hand, where the rubber hits the ground, people are quite supportive of the United States. People want to live in the United States. I think people basically understand that the freedom that we believe in, is a good thing for most people.

Q: My time is short, can I just throw two questions at you now..... In terms of George Tenet, his resignation, how do you think that will effect the war on terror, if it will? The big question is what you'll be doing here in Asia, the Asia Pacific, against terrorists?

SecDef: First, George Tenet is a truly talented public servant. He's a personal friend of mine. The person that I've worked closely with and care about as a person, and has very much valued our professional relationship. It's terribly important that there be a good institutional relationship between that Agency and the Department of Defense.

Q: ....But you've had your differences with him in the past.....

SecDef: Not that I know of. No. We've had a very close institutional relationship and a personal relationship I've known him for good many years, and have a lot of respect for him, and we're going to miss him in the government of the United States.

Q: Will there be any impact on the war on terror .....

SecDef: I don't think so. I mean, that institution is going to go on and do its job. I think we're just going to miss him as a talent and as a man of integrity and of ability.

Q: In terms of Asia Pacific, you are giving the keynotes speech for this annual meeting of the Defense ministers of Asia. What role does Asia play in the global war on terror? What's going to be your message?

SecDef: You know, I don't come out to Asia to lecture or to give advice. We're all in this together. We have a lot of close friends out here. The United State of America is a pacific nation, has been for well more than a hundred, a hundred fifty years. We have close friends here, important friends, and relationships. To the extent we can be helpful to them in coping with, and dealing with, and winning ultimately the struggle against extremists and radicals who were trying to change civil society, we want to be helpful. Certainly the task ahead of us is an important one, a serious one. It isn't going to be led one by one country, the United States or any other country. It's going to take corporation and close working relationships, consultations. We respect our friends out here, and to the extent that they can be helpful to us, and we can be helpful to them, then the world's a better place.

Thank you.

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