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Presenter: Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld

Friday, September 24, 2004

Media Availability with Secretary Rumsfeld following meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister and Defense Minister

SEC. RUMSFELD: I first want to apologize for the fact that the prime minister and the Defense minister are off to New York in different planes, as fate would have it, because we just finished an additional meeting with the Defense minister going over a number of things, and the prime minister, as you know, is speaking up there this afternoon, and sent his regards.

We've had very good meetings with the prime minister, the Defense minister, and the minister of Planning. Needless to say, the path towards liberty is not smooth there; it never has been. And my personal view is that a fair assessment requires some patience and some perspective.

If you think about it, we just spent the morning in there talking about elections, and talking about Iraq's freedom, and talking about the development of their security forces and their plans. A little over a year-and-a-half ago, it was the only nation on the face of the earth that was on a weekly basis firing at our aircraft and forcing the U.N. resolutions in the northern and southern no-fly zones. It was a country that harbored and sheltered terrorists. It was a country that was paying \$25,000 or \$20,000 to the families of suicide bombers; rewarding them, encouraging that. And here we are, 18 months later, and Iraq is a free nation, with a new government determined to defeat the extremists and to hold elections. Every Iraqi deserves the right to vote. We and the government of Iraq intend to see that the elections are held, intend to see that they are held on time, and to do every possible -- everything possible to see that that happens, and to see that every Iraqi has the right to vote.

We're seeing a campaign of suicide bombings and assassinations and chopping off people's heads. And notwithstanding that, notwithstanding the threats against the two gentlemen I just spent the morning with, whose lives obviously are threatened by the terrorists in that country and the extremists in that country, tens of thousands of courageous Iraqis are volunteering to serve in the Iraqi security forces. They're volunteering to serve in the interim government. And the last number I looked at I believe said that over -- by our count, over 722 Iraqi security force people have been killed. So they are stepping up. They're stepping forward. They are demonstrating courage, and that's impressive.

We recognize that there is an increased level of violence as we move towards these elections. We recognize that a free and peaceful Iraq is a powerful blow to the extremists in the world who are determined to have the world their way. The road ahead will take courage. It'll take patience. It will demand that the leadership there have steel in their spines, and they do. And those are certainly the characteristics of the

leadership we met with today.

I'd be happy to respond to some questions.

Q Mr. Secretary, I wonder if I might ask, sir, about something different that Senator Reed brought up in the hearing yesterday about the Defense Science Board report.

SEC. RUMSFELD: As I suggested to the best of my ability yesterday, and I haven't had a moment to go back and look at that report and find the answer to the question that I posed to myself as to what extent they'd be briefed prior to that summer study.

Q I understand, sir, but from what he read -- and that's, granted, only a very small part of the report -- it would suggest that perhaps the board is suggesting that the force -- the stress on the force now -- that it's close to being broken in terms of being able to respond to a new major -- in some ways --

SEC. RUMSFELD: No, I --

Q How would you --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yeah, I did not take that conclusion from the report -- the briefing I received on the report. Let me phrase it that way.

Q Well, are you concerned, sir, at all that it does raise concerns about --

SEC. RUMSFELD: I'm not concerned, because the chiefs repeatedly test our capabilities against the conceivable demands for those capabilities. And as General Myers and General Pace and other chiefs have repeatedly said, we have the capability of fulfilling the missions that the United States military are called upon to perform and likely to be called upon to perform.

I think what you -- what was in the report -- I don't want to characterize it, because I've not gone back to double-check it -- but I think a safe way to characterize it is this. Hypothetically, they said if you initiated a new set of activities every period of years and if those activities extended longer than the period between the initiation of new activities, you would for some period of time have a layering effect of requirements. And that's true. And therefore they raised questions as to how that could be dealt with.

Now we have been looking at the same issue, obviously, on a monthly basis. We have, as you know, under way something like 35 or 45 initiatives to reduce stress on the force. We have used the emergency authorities to increase the size of the force. And we have been undertaking as rapidly as possible the steps on that long list of initiatives, in ways that we believe should -- may not, but should deal with the kinds of problems that those hypothetical questions in that summer study posed. We are every bit as interested in the subject as anybody else. It's not like there's anything new there conceptually. I thought it was a sufficiently interesting study that I immediately asked that it be briefed to the chiefs, briefed to the combatant commanders, briefed to the senior civilian leadership in the department and the Joint Staff. And that's going forward -- not because it's novel or new, but because it's an important subject and it's something that it's our responsibility to think about and plan for.

Barbara?

Q On Iraq, given the fact that the U.S. military still has substantial security responsibilities, what do you now say to the American business community -- given the level of violence, given the concern about the recent beheadings of course, what do you say to American contractor companies about how comfortable they

should feel about sending their employees to -- their civilians to serve in Iraq between now and the elections?

SEC. RUMSFELD: First of all, we talk about Iraq as though it's a homogeneous, cohesive whole. And the fact is, just as in the United States or any other country, things are different; there are different circumstances in different parts of that country. And second -- therefore, the answer to the question is some places are -- as the prime minister indicated -- quite accessible to people; other places are more difficult. And we know that.

Second, we don't give advice to businesses. I mean, I was in business, and business people know how to make risk assessments. They do it all the time. They do it with respect to their employees. They do it with respect to their management techniques. They do it with respect to investments. And they know how to do this.

Q Well, if there was --

SEC. RUMSFELD: And they get insurance. They do all kinds of things.

Q But, of course, the U.S. government gives a lot of advice to American business and civilians.

SEC. RUMSFELD: The Department of Defense does not.

Q But the American government does, and a lot of that is based on security assessments throughout the United States government. I'm just wondering if you have a view about -- your view about how comfortable American business should be operating in Iraq at this time.

SEC. RUMSFELD: That's not my job to be giving advice to American business on that subject. Department of State opines on it from time to time. I think as a former businessman I can tell you what they look at: they look at the currency and they look at the investment climate and they look at the -- whether or not contracts will be fulfilled, and they make a risk-benefit assessment and then make their calculations and invest and act one way or another, and that's a perfectly rational way for them to do it.

Yes, Jim?

Q You said that United States and the Iraqi leaders were determined that every Iraqi should have the vote. Can you --

SEC. RUMSFELD: That we'd do everything possible to see that that's the case.

Q Can you eradicate those sanctuaries in the --

SEC. RUMSFELD: You have to --

Q -- Sunni Triangle before the elections, and can you do it without increasing the level of U.S. troops who are there?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, you know, time will tell. We've said it a hundred times; if General Abizaid decides he needs more forces, obviously there will be more U.S. forces. We know we're seeking more coalition forces, and some additional coalition forces have already agreed to participate, for example, with respect to protecting the U.N. during the election period.

Second, we know that the Iraqi forces are going up on a weekly basis, fully trained, fully equipped. The number is now about a hundred thousand, and it's increasing and expected to be close to 150,000 during that

period. So we know forces are going up.

And the question is, you match the coalition forces, the U.S. forces, the Iraqi forces against the circumstances on the ground at that time and make judgements? And that's what we'll do; we'll make judgments.

Q Is it a doable thing to accomplish that before January?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, time will tell. We'll all know soon enough. You folks report the news. You don't report the future, do you?

Q I'm trying to get your sense of the future, sir.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yes?

Q Mr. Secretary, how effective is the collaboration between the United States military and the Iraqi military with the increasing violence and the elections coming up?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I guess I -- it's hard to believe it could be much better. General Casey and Ambassador Negroponte and the national security team in Baghdad and Iraq have a very close set of relationships that are impressive, working well. They talk and meet frequently. They... when there's an issue that comes up as to what the priorities ought to be, and if it looks as though there's a difference in priorities, they immediately get together and sort it out. If there's an issue as to money, which budget should something come from, how can it be paid for, they immediately sort it out, if it's a high priority item. I've been impressed.

Pam?

Q First, I don't mean to be impertinent, but the not-fully trained and fully equipped, your own charts show that a quarter, only a quarter have body armor, vehicles aren't out --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Our charts are available to the public, and everything I said is exactly accurate.

Q My question --

SEC. RUMSFELD: And you should not leave the impression that what I said was not accurate.

Q But if...

SEC. RUMSFELD: Just a minute, just a minute. I could take the charts and walk you through them, and I'd be happy to have Larry get somebody to do that --

Q They just did that a couple of days ago.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Good. But the fact is, what we did was we took the numbers that the CPA and the Iraqi Governing Council had decided upon, and General Sanchez's team. I said: "I'm uncomfortable with those numbers. They're moving around too much for me. And what I want to do is send out an assessment team." I did. And it was a joint assessment team.

They came back, and I said: "I want to know what the facts are, what we actually have, that are trained and what training means, and what our standard ought to be. I want to know which percentage of those people that are out there doing things are equipped. And, I want to know what other countries have by way of numbers

of police, numbers of border guards, numbers of national guard, numbers of army people. And then we want to come up with a recommendation," which we did do to the Iraqis, "and come to closure as to what that ought to be."

It is not going to stay static. It is already moving. When we just met, the prime minister is concerned, for example, that he'd like to see a bit more armor and mechanized capability. And so they may be discussing how that might fit into that priority list.

Then we said let's clear the books. So we took off the site protection people, which were 73,000, as I recall -- plus or minus 5,000 -- and said, look, those are being handled basically by others, and let's take them away, and let's put under one entity, the Department of Defense, all the others -- border patrol, national guard, army, police. And let's try to get NATO to help train -- and they're now agreeing to do that. Let's also develop a standard as to what training is for each category.

Now what we have, I'm told by General Petraeus, for good or ill, and I believe it, and I talk to him every week on this subject -- and General Casey -- I'm told that the number we had is somewhere between 95,000 and 100,000 who are manned, on the job, that are trained, and that are equipped.

Now, the fact is we've got more people than that on the job, but they're not fully trained, or they may not be fully equipped. They then have a projection as to where they think the contracts for equipment will bring them, and where they think the rate they are training them will bring them -- which is yet to be seen; but we're telling you what that projection is, and what we hope it is. It could change. You could have a hurricane or something change it. Or you could get a contract challenged and you have to wait 30 days to get the equipment.

Now, if you know something I don't know about those numbers that I just described, tell me, because I would like to know.

Now -- I would.

Q (Laughs.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: I really would. I mean, it isn't impertinent at all because I believe Casey and Petraeus. And if you know something they don't know -- I know they think they're telling me the truth --

Q We might be having a cross-communication here. When you say that they're fully equipped, we were given a briefing earlier this week, and we looked at the charts, and they make it very helpful by putting green lights where things are fully equipped, red where they're not, amber where there is a problem.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Right. You can check the chart to see if the current level of --

Q Yeah, the people who are actually out there, how many of them have armor.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Right.

Q And that one is sticking in my mind; I think it was about 30 percent. And if you -- because we did go through this earlier.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Of course, a lot of them don't need it. I mean, if you've got policemen and they don't have it, and the reason is 30 percent or 40 percent of the police are working in an office - not a problem.

It's the number of people -- you cannot take the number of AK-47s against the number of police or the

number of army.

Q (Chuckling.) AK-47s, they all have --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Pardon me?

Q They all have AK-47s now, 100 percent.

SEC. RUMSFELD: I understand that, but listen to me.

Q Yeah.

SEC. RUMSFELD: You can't take that number and say it has to equal the number who are manned, because, first of all, there -- all the people manned are not on duty every 15 minutes. They work in shifts. So maybe you need a shift to be armed with an AK-47.

Some of the people are not ever going to go out there where they need an AK-47. They're going to be in an office.

So I mean, this has been thought about a great deal. I must have had 15 meetings on this subject. And it's becoming a bit of a football, and I'm uncomfortable about that, because it isn't right, it isn't accurate, and it isn't fair to the people who are doing the work and the people that are supplying the information. So if -- I'd be happy to have you sit down with Larry or somebody, and if you have some visibility into this that we don't, tell us. But my guess is, we're right.

Q Mr. Secretary

Q That wasn't even my question.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Pardon me?

Q (Laughing.) I'm sorry. I had a different question.

SEC. RUMSFELD: You get your question. What's your question, Pam? Come on.

Q My question is -- I'm sorry, everybody --

SEC. RUMSFELD: You just gave me a wonderful --

Q I sure did. (Laughter.) Narking out a friends.

My question is, what does Iraq have to -- this is the big picture, sir -- what does Iraq have to look like when the United States can declare victory and send the troops home? When the war started, there was this idea that Iraq would end up at the end of this process a democracy with minority rights, rights for women, et cetera, et cetera, peace in the streets. I've just returned -- and the expectation over there, at least on the military side, is somewhat different. Which basically says we can leave when we get the Iraqi security forces up to the point where they can meet the threat of the insurgency, and then they're on their own.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Okay. Let me try it.

First of all, it's not my decision. It's the president's and the Iraqi government's. But if I were to go back to

what we said, it's slightly different than what you just said we said, Pam. I wouldn't want to, you know, be impertinent, but -- (laughter) --

Q Just not possible with you.

SEC. RUMSFELD: -- but I shall. (Laughter.)

I think what we said was something like this. I hope what we said was something like this. That we saw an Iraq that was a single country, not broken in pieces; that was at peace with its neighbors and didn't have weapons of mass destruction; and that fashioned a government that was respectful of the various women, religious groups, all the diversity that existed in that country. We did not fashion a template and said it has to look like this. We said it's going to be an Iraqi solution. And now you say what ought - so that's a fairly modest -- it's a big task, but it does --it isn't 15 things that have to be that way; it's a few, very few.

Q Okay, I don't see any daylight between what I said and what you said... at peace, minority rights --

SEC. RUMSFELD: I'll get the transcript and I'll show you the difference.

Q (Laughs.) Okay. Go on.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Now what does it have to look like? There's a tension there. No country wants foreign forces in their country any longer than they have to be there. The more of them you have, the more force protection you have to have, the more combat support you have to have. And the more -- the heavier your footprint is, the more intrusive you are in their lives. And the question is to balance the numbers against the disadvantage that begins to accrue by having an excessively large footprint against the advantage that can accrue by having more people to do more things to help get to the point you want to: that they, in fact, can take over those responsibilities.

If any implication that that place has to be peaceful and perfect before we can reduce coalition and U.S. forces I think would obviously be unwise, because it's never been peaceful and perfect and it isn't likely to be. It's a tough part of the world.

Our goal is to invest the time and the money and the effort to help them train up Iraqis to take over those responsibilities.

We had something like 200 or 300 or 400 people killed in many of the major cities of America last year. Is it perfectly peaceful? No. What's the difference? We just didn't see each homicide in every major city in the United States on television every night. It happens here in this city, in every major city in the world. Across Europe, across the Middle East, people are being killed. People do bad things to each other. The idea that we'd have to stay there till that place was peaceful -- as I think you said, or something like that -- and everyone goes happily on their way, or whatever you said. We'll check the transcript.

STAFF: We only have time for maybe one more.

Q Mr. Secretary --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Sir.

Q May I do a follow-up on what Jim asked before? There seems to be perhaps an erroneous impression among us, and I know you want to clarify that if you can. And that is that there is some kind of a disconnect between our military leaders in Baghdad, Iraq, and the prime minister, as to whether or not the U.S.

military and the coalition should use major assault tactics against Fallujah and some of the other cities -- urban warfare. And the feeling that perhaps the prime minister would prefer to hold off and wait to see if he can solve a situation diplomatically.

Has there been any agreement? Did you discuss this with him? Can you give us a current status?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I really can't add -- I don't know that I can get into that in any useful way. I think if you took a step back and said, in any country of the world - how might one handle things, just generically? Obviously your first choice always is to work something out, and not use force. And that's fact number one. Fact number two is, you can't afford to have safe havens in your country where people are free to go about trying to undermine and destroy your government, or your country, or the people who are doing things that are peaceful -- the police, the governing officials. You can't have that over a sustained period of time. Therefore, you must do something about it.

The question is, what do you do about it? You've got two choices. You either solve it diplomatically and through negotiation and whatever, or you do it with force. Now, how does it generally happen? It generally happens that you prepare to use force and be ready to use force and demonstrate that you're willing to use force, and you find that sometimes that helps with the negotiations.

Q But is it working?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, look, those are issues for the prime minister and Ambassador Negroponte, and General Casey, and General Abizaid to worry through. Is it working some places? Sure. It's worked already in a number of places. In some places we've used force, in some places we've used diplomacy. Has it worked everywhere? Did it work in Fallujah? No, obviously not; it didn't work in Fallujah. The Fallujah brigade didn't work; and they tried, and they're sorry. And they're not going to let it sit there, they're going to do something else about it. And life will go on.

Q When are they going to do something else? I mean, pretty soon?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Come on, Ivan! You know better than that! I'm not going to get into that.

Q Secretary, you talked about football earlier. It seems like the wheels are in motion to make not just Iraq the football, but the entire playing field for the presidential elections, to point of --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Look, I don't do politics, you know that.

Q Well, I know you don't do politics. But the opposition party is talking in particular --

SEC. RUMSFELD: That's their problem.

Q But they're saying -- but the -- yeah. The criticism of this administration and the war, the argument is that Iraq was not a threat to the United States before the war, and the terrorist threat in Iraq has come since the Americans went in there.

SEC. RUMSFELD: I've got the --

Q You've heard this before.

SEC. RUMSFELD: -- thrust of your comment. And I'll repeat myself: I don't do politics.

I will say one thing, though. I will say one thing. It is a mistake to look at Iraq or Afghanistan or anywhere else through a soda straw and say, "Oh, my! That's what's happening in the world." It's true things are happening in Iraq, they're happening in Afghanistan, they're happening in the Horn of Africa, and they've also happened in Madrid and Turkey and Bali and Indonesia and countries all over the world. We are in a very serious worldwide struggle and it is serious business, and focusing excessively on any one piece of it, I believe, is a disservice to those who listen.

I think that the important thing is to understand that there is a small minority of that religion that are determined to hijack that religion; that are teaching people that it is in their interest to go out and cut off people's heads and chop off people's hands, and to kill innocent men, women and children. And the kind of world those people want for us, for you, for me, for the Iraqi people, the Afghan people, and the people of country after country across this globe, is a dark world. It is an ugly world. It is a world no one with an ounce of sense would want to live in. It's a world where in soccer stadiums they -- instead of playing soccer, they assassinate people. It's the Taliban rule worldwide, or in country after country that where they think they can succeed. And that is what's going on in Afghanistan, and that is what's going on in Iraq. And it's terribly important for people to get it.

Q But the argument seems to be not just from political parties, there's others that --

SEC. RUMSFELD: I don't do politics. I'd love to. I used to do it. It would be a lot of fun --

Q It's not just -- not just from politicians, though. The argument seems to be that rather than making that problem better that what we're doing is inflaming it more. And that -- and you've heard that --

SEC. RUMSFELD: That's not true.

Q Mr. Secretary, you mentioned the election --

SEC. RUMSFELD: I thought we had my last question there.

Q One more. You mentioned the elections going on in -- scheduled for January. But --

SEC. RUMSFELD: No more Mr. Nice Guy, Larry.

Q But sir, do you think, though, that there will --

STAFF: I'll find it on E-bay someday.

Q Do you think there will be time, though, to prepare voter rolls and all the things that have to be done in a peaceful environment prior to that? Plus the United Nations has just a handful of staff there, and they still think it's too dangerous to go ahead. So if there's no voter rolls, there are no ways to do this, to prepare for them in a peaceful environment, how could they even happen?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Look, there were people saying similar things to what you just asked about whether you could have an Iraqi Governing Council. There were people saying you couldn't pass sovereignty over to the Iraqi interim government. There were people saying you couldn't have the meeting that was just held with a thousand Iraqis selecting a hundred Iraqis to serve in a constituent assembly. It just happens that the next thing down the road is an election, in January -- maybe before, maybe later. I don't -- I assume it'll be -- I forget when it is. Is it January?

STAFF (?): It's January.

SEC. RUMSFELD: It's January. So it'll be in January sometime.

Do I think it'll happen? Yes, I do think it'll happen. Did I think the other things would happen? Yes, I did. Were a lot of people like you asking the question, "Well, maybe not, maybe not, maybe not?" Yes, there were, and every single benchmark been made. And the same thing was true in Afghanistan. And they punched them out, one after another after another; they've met their goals.

Now, it is our intention and our expectation that there will be free and fair elections in Iraq. The situation in Iraq currently is uneven. It has been for months. Some locations are going to present somewhat greater challenges than others. We know that. The former regime elements and the terrorists obviously don't want there to be elections. Why? Because the Iraqi people overwhelmingly want there to be elections. That's their goal. They believe in that. We're dealing with those areas. The coalition forces, the Iraqi security forces, the U. S. forces are dealing with those areas that are uneven, that aren't as peaceful as one would want.

I think the important thing that people should think about: instead of trying to speculate about what about this could go wrong, what about that could go -- think of what we're doing. We're talking about elections in Iraq -- unbelievable 18 months ago. Here was a dictatorship, a vicious dictatorship, and we're talking about elections. That is a breathtakingly wonderful thing to be doing.

So I'm glad you asked the question, and I'm glad Larry let you take one more.

And it's good to see you all. Thank you.

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