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**Presenter: Secretary Of Defense Donald Rumsfeld; and  
General John Abizaid, Commander, U.S. Central Command**

**Wednesday, January 26, 2005 12:09 p.m.  
EST**

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## Press Stakeout Following Briefing of House Armed Services Committee on Iraq And Afghanistan

REP. DUNCAN HUNTER (R-CA) (chairman, House Armed Services Committee): Hi, folks. We had a good briefing today by the secretary and General Abizaid. Covered the -- obviously the two war-fighting theaters. Lots of questions. And I think there was a somber overtone today because of the casualties that we took in the 53 that went down last night. So we had a full membership, very robust hearing. And the secretary and General Abizaid asked -- answered lots of questions about operations and about the stand-up of the Iraqi military.

And I think we will be happy to answer a couple of questions. The secretary has to leave very shortly. But I'll let you take a couple.

Q Mr. Secretary, General, you could provide us with an update on the helicopter crash?

GEN. ABIZAID: Well, I can tell you what we know. Of course our condolences go out to the families of those young Marines that were killed in the crash; 31 on board that we know of. We don't believe that there were any survivors. Out in the area of Ar Rutbah, which is in western Iraq. Weather was bad. We don't know of any enemy action. The investigation continues. There will have to be more that comes out of this to learn what happened.

Q General, can you tell us what kind of mission it was -- (off mike)? Are other helicopter crews in danger?

GEN. ABIZAID: No, I would say it was not a special mission. It was a routine mission in support of the elections. That's all I know. I think it's a dangerous environment that we operate in Iraq; we all understand that. And again, our condolences to the families.

Q As we approach the election, how confident are you about the security situation on the ground as folks go to vote?

GEN. ABIZAID: Well, the security situation on the ground, of course, in 14 out of the 18 provinces, we believe that the security situation is relatively stable. There are four provinces where the security situation is difficult; it's in western Baghdad, the al Anbar province, Nineveh and Salahuddin province.

That having been said, we believe that a combination of Iraqi security forces and coalition forces will make the situation stable enough for voting to take place.

Q Mr. Rumsfeld, are you in agreement with recent assessments --

REP. HUNTER: Thank you very much.

One last one. Let's let --

Q -- (inaudible) -- troops will be needed in Iraq for the next two years. Do you agree with that assessment or do you see it differently?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I don't know who made such an assessment.

Q I think the Army made -- or it was Army testimony --

SEC. RUMSFELD: No it wasn't. At least I've not seen anything like that. I saw a news article that was quoting General Lovelace, and he said quite the opposite. He said that the Army has to plan, it has to look forward, and it looks forward one, two, three years. And what they do is develop an assumption. And so they said for the sake of argument, assume you kept the same level of forces there over that period, how would we meet that? Then they do various sensitivities; they say what if it's more, what if it's less? Then they say how would we deal with that situation?

But it certainly was not an assessment of any kind, and he said that very explicitly, if I'm not mistaken.

Q Do you envision that that will be the case --

SEC. RUMSFELD: No --

Q What do people expect, do you think --

SEC. RUMSFELD: No, it's --

Q -- in terms of troop levels?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Let me respond.

The answer is no, it was not an assessment. It was not a judgment by the Army or the Department of Defense or anyone else as to what would be the case. It is what the Army has to do; it has to plan, it has to look forward and say, "What if we wanted this level for that period? What if it were more? What if it were less?" And that's all it was. It would be a misunderstanding to characterize it the way you did.

Q No, what I'm asking you, though, sir, is what is your assessment?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Thank you. We have -- the president has said that it is not a timetable and it's not a numbers game. And the task is to see that the Iraqi security forces develop the capacity and the capability and the leadership so that they can assume responsibility for security in that country. And that's the process that General Abizaid and his team are engaged in.

Thank you.

REP. HUNTER: Thank you, folks.

GEN. ABIZAID: Thank you.

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