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

**Tuesday, February 1, 2005**

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## Secretary Rumsfeld's Interview with Bret Baier, FOX News

Mr. Secretary, thanks for being with us. A historic election obviously in Iraq. That day, as you were watching those pictures come in, talking to commanders, and now days after -- your reactions.

RUMSFELD: There are two powerful reactions or feelings that I had. One was that as those Iraqis went out, sometimes very tentatively, stood around the polling place, didn't go in to vote, waited to see if anyone else was going to vote, and finally voted. Then what they saw was everyone else was voting. Think of the confidence they gained.

They were told if they voted they would be killed. The election workers were told they'd be killed if they worked at the election area. Iraqi security forces were attacked and they stayed right there and did their job. Acts of enormous personal courage by those people, but the important thing was they saw that the overwhelming majority of the Iraqis, millions of Iraqis, want to vote, they want to have elections, they want to be free, they want to make a success out of their country, and they saw that everyone else felt that way. The encouragement and the confidence that that gives them just has to be enormous. That has to cause a tipping of support for the government, whoever is elected.

The second thing, you can't help but think of all the people who have been killed or wounded, and all the people who have said we shouldn't be there, we should pull out, we shouldn't have done it, that type of thing. Those people who were there putting their lives at risk, those people who fell in the nation's service over there, those people who were wounded and are now in recuperation and therapy and trying to recover from terrible wounds, they have to be proud.

Q: What do you think this election will do for the security situation on the ground in Iraq?

RUMSFELD: Well, if you have a country of 25 million people and you have X thousands of criminals, terrorists, Ba'athists, former regime elements who want to blow up things and make bombs and kill people, they can still do that. That happens in most major cities in the world, most countries in the world, that people get killed and there's violence, and it's a violent part of the world. So I don't expect that it will end the violence. I do think that they are clearly now on a path towards a free system. And if you think back about Afghanistan, everyone said this country couldn't do it. Sure enough, there they are, they've elected a president, they're going to have parliamentary elections this April or May. They're on a good path towards a democratic system stacked full of all of the diverse elements of the country. People get killed occasionally. It's violent. And the only thing that gets reported, though, is the people getting killed and the violence. Because in fact in Afghanistan, they're a

year and a half, two years ahead of Iraq, but look how long it took to have elections in Germany and Japan. It took years.

Q: The Sunnis who stayed away, do you believe they were staying away because they were boycotting or because they were intimidated?

RUMSFELD: Probably both.

Q: Both?

RUMSFELD: Sure. You have what, 20 percent of the population ran the country for 35 years. Not a bad deal. And not likely to happen now. So they're trying to figure out how this all works.

Put it this way, in a vicious dictatorship like that, that existed for so many decades, the idea that a piece of paper, a constitution, can protect people from oppression or from unfairness by another element in their community, you want to be very careful before you buy that, so they are careful. And I can understand their being careful, but it's going to happen. It's going to happen because every other element in that country knows that for success, they want the Sunnis involved. There are going to be Sunnis, there are Sunnis on the list. There will be Sunnis elected. The process will reflect the reality that the winners in this election know that it's in their interest to find ways to engage the Sunnis that don't have blood on their hands.

Q: Do you have any metric to gauge how many Iraqi forces are trained and equipped enough to be able to take the reins now?

RUMSFELD: Sure. We know. We know there are 130,200 Iraqis who have been trained and equipped. Some of them have been trained, then they're out on the job one day later. Some have been trained and they've been experienced for six months or a year. So it's very uneven as to the experience they have. There's also another 70,000 site protection people who have been trained in varying ways and they protect sites. They're not Ministry of Defense or Ministry of Interior.

Now what does that mean? Is that enough? The answer is no. It's going to take more than that in a country like that. How many more? It's hard to know because you don't know how violent the insurgency is going to be. Their problem is not to defend themselves against external threats at the present time, their problem is to repress that insurgency and stop it. And --

Q: You know there's a lot of debate on this subject, on the numbers of Iraqi troops that are ready. Senator Biden in Condoleezza Rice's hearing said, "For God's sakes don't listen to Rumsfeld, he doesn't know what in the hell he's talking about on this." How do you respond to that?

RUMSFELD: Obviously the people who are providing this information, provide it every week, we put it on the web site, it's available to any member of the House or Senate or the public. And the fact of the matter is that there are 130,200 who have been trained and equipped -- no matter what he says. That's a fact. And how do I know that? I know it because General Petraeus counts them.

Now are some getting killed every day? Sure. Are some retiring at various times or injured? Yes, they're gone. Are new ones coming in every day? Yes. Are the numbers adjusting every day? Certainly. Does that mean that because a person's trained and equipped that they're as highly skilled or as competent as U.S. forces? Of course not. There isn't a military in the Middle East that's as competent as U.S. forces. But the idea that that number's wrong is just not correct. The number is right. The number is what General Petraeus is saying it is and I believe him. And I believe General Casey, and I believe General Abizaid.

Now the important thing is that that really misses the point, the numbers. What you're looking for is capability. Capability is a function partly of numbers, partly of training, partly of equipment, but it's also a function of leadership, it's a function of experience. And these are not battle-hardened veterans. These are not people who have been in the military or the police or the border patrol or the National Guard for two, four, six, eight years and had deployments and had experience and know the chain of command. The ministries are terribly weak. They didn't exist so they're being staffed up now. You need a strong ministry to see that the effectiveness of the forces is there.

Q: So are we entering tougher times now, post-election? Or is this the beginning of a stage where down the road we're going to see U.S. troops coming home in large numbers?

RUMSFELD: Look, the President said they're going to stay as long as they're needed and not one day longer. Now what does that mean? It means we have no intention in keeping them there permanently. We have every intention of bringing them home. The goal is to assist the Iraqis to develop the capability with respect to their security forces so that they can provide for their own security and that's what we're doing. When that's done they'll come home.

Q: Is this tough? Tough days ahead definitely?

RUMSFELD: Oh, sure. It's bound to be tough. It's a tough part of the world. This isn't an easy business. It's not smooth sledding. It never has been. There's never been a country that's gone from a dictatorship to a democracy on a featherbed. It just doesn't work that way.

Q: Do you see this as a vindication personally, this election as a vindication of you after a year of a lot of critics coming after you, and maybe a vindication of U.S. policy?

RUMSFELD: I don't think of it in terms of vindication or even a need for vindication. I don't think there's ever been a wartime President or a wartime Secretary of Defense where there haven't been people critical of it and saying what about this or what about that, or this should be this way or this should be that way. That comes with the territory. What's important is that we have wonderful young men and women out there that are doing an absolutely superb job for our country. They're well led, they're well equipped. They know that what they're doing is noble work and when this is over they will look back with great pride on what they've accomplished, on the people, 25 million people in Afghanistan they've liberated, 25 million people in Iraq they will have liberated, and they will see those two countries on a path towards democracy and they'll be proud the rest of their lives.

Q: Mr. Secretary, thank you.

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