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Presenter: Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld and Prime Minister Allawi Tuesday, April 12, 2005

Secretary Rumsfeld Press Availability with Prime Minister Allawi

RUMSFELD: -- General Casey and the Ambassador and I have had good meetings today. I am back in Iraq, I don't know how many times I've been here but it's a great many times, and have had an opportunity to tell the men and women in uniform of the United States and the multinational forces how much we appreciate their service here, how important their work is, and how successful their work has been.

Every time I come back I am impressed by the closer coordination with the Iraqi security forces, with the strengthening of the Iraqi security forces in terms of their training and equipping. Needless to say our goal is to have the Iraqi security forces assume full responsibility of the security of the country as the basis for continuing the successful political process and the successful economic reconstruction of the country.

So Mr. Prime Minister, your hospitality is always appreciated, and I guess we'd be happy to answer some easy, gentle questions.

PRESS: Mr. Secretary, as you said you got to see American commanders and the Iraqi leadership. In terms of meetings with your commanders, was there any discussion of the need to reshape or refocus a military campaign plan given the recent political developments? And on your discussions with the Iraqi leadership do you leave Iraq today with any clearer picture of what the long-term strategic relationship between the U.S. and Iraq can contribute[inaudible] military, economic, or [inaudible]? Thank you.

RUMSFELD: First let me just say that the situation in Iraq has evolved over the past two years and as it's evolved under the leadership of General Casey most recently the approach that's been taken as evolved as well. And it is continuing to evolve. I think what we'll see in the weeks and months ahead is a continuing refocusing of coalition forces on working with the Iraqi security forces to have them assume more and more of the responsibility for security.

With respect to a longer term relationship between Iraq and the United States or other coalition countries, we've seen several things. We've seen the United Nations Resolution that's existed here, we've seen the role of NATO on training and equipping, and my guess is that what will transpire is that as the new constitution is drafted in the coming weeks and months and then voted on by the Iraqi people, I believe in

October, without delays we hope, and then the new Iraqi government is elected under that constitution, that the elected officials under the constitution would make judgments as to their relationships with other countries and very likely that's how it would evolve.

PRESS: Secretary, you have brought a message to the Iraqi government. Its goal is to communicate to the schedule for writing the constitution as well as the set date for the coming elections. We received the answers regarding issues and what kind of discussions did you conduct here?

RUMSFELD: My view is that the Iraqi people will want the opportunity to participate in voting on their own constitution and that the sooner that happens under the timetable that's been set by the Iraqis, the better for the Iraqi people which is the reason I said that any delay I thought would be unfortunate.

I have found in my meetings thus far that that same view is shared by the Iraqi leadership and that there is a desire to move forward roughly on the schedule that's been presented, which is a good thing.

PRESS: Secretary, we have something important. You have visited Iraq several times.

RUMSFELD: More than several.

PRESS: The goals and the context [inaudible] what are we doing here. [inaudible]

RUMSFELD: I think that Dr. Allawi and his team have made historic contributions to the success that we've seen here in Iraq. The elections on January 30th were an accomplishment that has been noticed not simply in Iraq but in the entire region. The progress that's being made here is notable. I believe that the security environment enables the political process to go forward. It enables the economic development to go forward. All three have to proceed together.

My hope is that as the new government comes in in this period and Iraq moves from an Interim Government to a Transitional Government, and then as the new government comes in in December and January and they move from a Transitional Government to an Iraqi Government, that these transitions will take place without undue disruption or turbulence in the excellent progress that's being made with respect to the Iraqi security forces. It would be most unfortunate if these changes caused a delay or a disruption in the progress that we've seen, because our goal and the goal of the coalition forces is to pass off the responsibility for security to the Iraqi security forces as soon as they're capable of assuming that responsibility.

PRESS: Good afternoon, Prime Minister. You've led your country in one of its most crucial times in its history. As you prepare now to go to your next phase of service to your country, when you look back on the last couple of months, what do you see as your greatest perhaps disappointment or regret, and what advice would you give to those who take the office you have now, if it's not you in the future again at some point? And what would you warn them about dealing with the Americans?

ALLAWI: First of all, let me tell you there are not [a failing]. There have been problems definitely in the past, but I am very proud that we have done the elections, very proud that there are [inaudible] institutions, and very proud that we have led our country in a movement from that and achieved the great deeds within a very delicate period, me and my colleagues.

During this past episode we had very [inaudible] with us [inaudible], and most important the United States with them. It has not only made liberation possible but also helping us in developing institutions, helping us [inaudible] our country.

Definitely what I will pass to the coming government [inaudible] that we should stick to the timetable of the next elections, continue to develop institutions, [inaudible] disruptions in these institutions, and cementing national unity and reconciliation in Iraq because this is the key to success. And to include everybody into the terms, to be inclusive of the process, and to embark on a friendly, peaceful foreign policy with those regimes and creating problems in Iraq and elsewhere in the Islamic communities. Thank you.

RUMSFELD: Very good.

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