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Presenter: Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld; and General Peter Pace, Vice Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

Wednesday, July 20, 2005 1:34 p.m. EDT

DoD News Briefing

SEC. RUMSFELD: Good afternoon, folks.

Today the coalition countries and much of the civilized world mourns the assassination of Iraqi officials involved in drafting the Iraqi constitution. It was a terrible act of violence; another in a series of attacks that have murdered Iraqi citizens. It underscores the nature of the fight in Iraq. If violent extremists do such things to these people and to innocent Iraqi children, it's clear what kind of a regime theirs would be, particularly a regime with the resources that Iraq has, and the close working relationship between the terrorists and al Qaeda. And one can imagine what they would try to do to the American people and other civilized societies.

Violence has long been a mainstay in Iraq, and violence will likely continue to some degree well after coalition forces depart. One, therefore, might ask how we can measure how well the Iraqi people are doing in their movement to self-government and to security.

Tomorrow the department will provide Congress with an update on Iraq's progress in moving towards a secure and self-supporting society. A classified supplement will outline additional metrics being used to assess performance and capability of the Iraqi security forces. This report, one of a series of updates we regularly supply Congress, will assess Iraq's status on the political and economic and security fronts.

On the political front, terrorists have failed to derail the political process. A constitutional referendum remains on schedule for October 15, and elections for a new assembly are scheduled for December 15th of this year. The U.N. is supporting Iraq's constitutional development process. The U.S. and the EU jointly hosted a conference in Brussels that led to additional pledges of financial support for the new government. Jordan will host an international donors conference later this month. And Iraq's confidence in the future is increasing. A recent poll showed that the number of Iraqis believing that their country is going in the right direction has gone up from 52 percent in January to some 61.5 percent today.

On the economic front, new business registrations have increased by about 50 percent in the first six months of this year. There's been a remarkable growth in cell phone and Internet usage. Access to both were severely restricted under Saddam Hussein's repressive regime.

Finally, on the security front, infrastructure attacks have decreased since the January election. Week-to-week incidents are off their pre-election peak. And the number of Iraqi security forces now exceeds the number of coalition troops by a good margin.

The report also offers a candid assessment of the challenges that remain for the Iraqi people and for the coalition. Among them: though they've suffered numerous setbacks, terrorists in Iraq remain effective, adaptable and intent on carrying out attacks against Iraqi civilians and Iraqi officials.

Extremists continue to try to foment tension, ethnic strife, and indeed, even civil war between Sunnis and Shi'as, through murder and attacks on religious sites.

Countries such as Syria and Iran remain notably unhelpful in assisting Iraq in securing its borders from foreign invaders.

And unemployment remains a concern, though increasing business investment should help alleviate that problem.

So I've outlined what the report is. What it is not is also important.

It's not the single source of knowledge about what's going on in Iraq. The Department of State, the Justice Department and other departments and agencies of our government that are involved all report on the tasks that they supervise. They also compile a variety of reports and information for the Congress. Some of this material has found its way into our report; some of it has not.

What this report does, however, is answer some specific questions the department was asked in the legislation that Congress passed earlier this year. A full understanding of all that's happening in Iraq relies on a comprehensive view of the work of all of these departments, and not just the Department of Defense.

I should add that this report is made up in major portion from information supplied by the Iraqi ministries, and in the case of their security forces, by the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior.

Another point. When this report's released, I have no doubt that some will sift through its pages quickly and look for problems. This is understandable and even welcome. And the department has benefited from the perspective of others, including the media, by identifying problems that need to be addressed. Still, it will be interesting to see how much of the progress that has been outlined will also be covered in the news reports, along with the problems.

Today, we're witnessing a movement to democracy in many parts of the world, with profound consequences for international security. Perceptible movements towards greater freedom are also evident in a number of areas of the Middle East and Central Asia. Yet these historic events are to some extent being overlooked amid the coverage of the latest acts of violence. Though the American people need to know about the acts of violence, I think it's also helpful for them to know the context in which this -- these changes are taking place.

In regard to the two Sunnis serving on the constitutional drafting committee, for example, it's important for the American people to understand why these men were murdered. They were murdered for what they believed and for what they were trying to build -- a new, democratic and peaceful Iraq.

Millions of Iraqis remain determined to continue that mission, and violent extremists are desperate to stop them. Yet despite their headline-grabbing mass murders, the extremists are failing. Indeed, the murders of Iraqi citizens and children appear to be hardening the majority of the Iraqi people's commitment to defeat al

Qaeda and to build a better country. And with the support of the outstanding men and women in uniform from our country and from the other coalition countries, I believe they will do just that.

General Pace.

GEN. PACE: Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

If I might wear my Marine uniform for just a minute, yesterday at Arlington National Cemetery we laid to rest one of our great military leaders, General Louis H. Wilson, who as a captain, July 24th and 25th of 1944, leading his Marines in combat, earned the Medal of Honor. He served until becoming a four-star general and our commandant of the Marine Corps. And at a time when our corps had drug problems, recruiting problems, gangs in the barracks, General Wilson stood tall, took command, and said, "Marines don't do that." And the Marines that are on the battlefield today look to his leadership in two ways: first, as Marines in combat, for the way he performed his job on Guam; and second, for those of us in leadership positions, the way that he performed his duties as a leader.

We're all better off that he served this country. We wish his family the very best. Thank you.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Charlie?

Q Mr. Secretary, you pointed out -- first of all, you've given us, it seems, a nutshell of this report that's going to Congress. Has it gone up? And when will it be released?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I think it will be up tomorrow. It could be Friday. And the public part will be released the day it goes up, as I recall. And the classified portion, one would hope, would not be released; but I can't be sure of that. (Scattered laughter.)

Q You point out that two Sunnis were murdered, this group that's writing the constitution. Four others quickly quit the group that's writing, at least temporarily, writing, in protest, saying that they couldn't be protected. What does that say about security in Iraq?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, obviously it's understandable that people are concerned about their associates being assassinated. And my understanding is that they have indicated -- I don't believe they said they had quit permanently, I think they had stepped aside temporarily. And we'll see what it means. But obviously, a country like Iraq doesn't go through the process they're going through without having difficulties of that type.

And the interesting thing I think -- the perspective I would give to it is the fact that these kinds of problems have occurred month after month after month, and yet, we always see more people step up to participate in the elections, more people step up to participate in the Iraqi Transitional Assembly and to run for public office, more people step up to serve in the Iraqi security forces. And it shows that the Iraqi people have a lot of courage.

And as I pointed out in my remarks, this country was not without its violence over the past three decades. The -- hundreds of thousands of people that are alleged to have been buried in these mass graves of Saddam Hussein's didn't get there through natural causes. They were murdered.

Q Mr. Secretary?

Q General Pace -- I'm sorry. You -- it has -- it's been under consideration of whether U.S. troops would take -- would begin to take an active part in protecting ambassadors -- foreign ambassadors in Baghdad and perhaps high government officials. Have any decisions been made on that -- on whether U.S. troops might

begin taking a part in protecting those folks?

GEN. PACE: The only discussions I know about, Charlie, have been between our ambassador in Iraq and our military leaders there about protecting some of the senior leaders of the Iraqi government itself. I'm not aware of any discussions about other government's officials.

Q Have any decisions been made on protecting those senior Iraqi officials?

GEN. PACE: Those decisions were made some time ago. I'd prefer not to get into the specifics, but we are providing to the Iraqi leadership, both in support -- direct support and in assistance, education, training and the like -- a level of protection that their government and ours deem appropriate for that.

Q Mr. Secretary, may we go back to the Times report just for a moment? With the massive buildup -- thank you -- the massive buildup of China's military, does this and our relationship with Taiwan not put the United States in a more precarious position? If China should flex its muscles and try to annex or invade Taiwan, and we intervene even with surface ships, or what have you, in the straits of Taiwan; if we lose ships or they're damaged as an act of war, is the United States now willing to go to war to protect Taiwan in this day?

And I suppose, General Pace, even though it's a nuclear situation -- but can the United States win such a war?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Our position with respect to Taiwan and the People's Republic of China hasn't changed in years, to my knowledge. It is what it is. It is a -- to oversimplify an understanding -- that our view is that whatever changes are to be made in that connection should be made on a peaceful basis by both countries. And that's where we have been. That's where we are today. And I think that the general behavior that we've seen in that part of the world suggests that that's over time very likely how it will all work out. And I don't think speculating about the kinds of questions you've posed is very useful. But certainly we're capable -- our country is capable of doing those things that we've indicated have the capability of doing.

Q Mr. Secretary, can I go back to --

GEN. PACE: If I might add, the -- you judge military threat in two ways: one, capacity, and two, intent. There's lots of countries in the world that have the capacity to wage war. Very few have the intent to do so. And clearly we have a complex but good relationship with China. So there's absolutely no reason for us to believe there's any intent on their part.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yes?

Q Back to Iraq, the report. General Pace was pressed in his nomination hearing to provide some unclassified not only metrics but some sense of how much of the Iraqi security force is ready to conduct autonomous combat operations. You hinted that this information is going to be in the classified annex. How does that comport to the spirit of the members of Congress who want more public discussion here, rather than heightened classification?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yeah. There's always that difficulty, if you think about it. We don't make public the readiness and capabilities of our various units. They're classified --

Q But the general --

SEC. RUMSFELD: -- for good reason, they're classified. And the information we're getting is in large measure from the Iraqi security forces. It's their information. It's not for us to tell the other side, the enemy, the

terrorists, that this Iraqi unit has this capability, and that Iraqi unit has this capability. That's not their interest. That's not our interest. And I think you'll find that members of Congress are reasonable, and they'll understand the purposes of classification in a case like that.

Q Well, how -- wait. How does the public, though, get a sense? This has been a cutting-edge issue. General Casey said that there needed to be some system for allowing the public to know how many Iraqi troops will progressively be able to take over the mission on their own. How do you judge it?

SEC. RUMSFELD: And we report to the Congress on a regular basis. We -- I think it's been every two weeks; it may be every month now -- in a very comprehensive report, which has an unclassified portion and a classified portion. There is no mystery for the members of the United States Congress as to what we believe to be the evolution of these forces.

And there's several ways to look at it. One way is to look at it numerically. How many are there? How many have the right equipment, this -- these types of pieces of equipment?

The other way to look at it is the softer things. How is the experience? Are they battle-hardened? How's the morale? What kind of noncommissioned officers and middle-level officers do they have? How's the chain of command functioning? What's the relationship between the Ministry of Defense forces and the Ministry of Interior forces?

So those are soft things. And you can't quantify those. And the idea of discussing weaknesses, if you will, strengths and weaknesses of "this unit has a poor chain of command," or "these forces are not as effective because their morale's down," I mean, that would be mindless, to put that kind of information out.

Q I wasn't asking you to put it down to the unit level, just kind of a general sense of progress.

SEC. RUMSFELD: We provide a general sense.

Q Well, General Pace, are you satisfied that your answers to the Senate Armed Services Committee, you know, answered the mail, basically, in terms of what they wanted?

GEN. PACE: Two answers to that. One, I'm satisfied with the answer I gave. And apparently they weren't satisfied with the answer they received.

SEC. RUMSFELD: (We/he ?) can confirm. (Chuckles.)

GEN. PACE: As the secretary said, with our own forces -- I mean, let's just use our own Army. We tell the American public how many soldiers are in the United States Army; we tell them how many brigades there are in the United States Army. We tell lots of information that talks about size and shape. We do not talk publicly, but we do talk to our own Congress about readiness levels, which helps our Congress determine how they might assist us in resourcing whatever the deficiencies might be. We don't talk about deficiencies in public because that tells the enemy where we're currently vulnerable.

The same thing with the Iraqi forces. We are telling everyone publicly what the current size is and what the size we're going to grow to. But are not going to discuss publicly the weaknesses that they have because, like with our own forces, we want to keep that from the enemy. We do tell the Congress privately, classified, exactly what these facts are. So there is a dialogue, just not one in the public.

SEC. RUMSFELD: You know, I would add one thing. They are also -- they can be terribly misleading. You know, our military we use C-1 for the most ready, and C-3 is not ready. One day I was in my office and I

said to one of our senior generals -- he was pointing out that a certain unit was C-3. They'd just come back from Iraq. And the outfit that had just gone over was C-1 -- top readiness. And I said to him, "Say, if you were going to war tomorrow, which unit would you rather go to war with, the C-1 or the C-3?" And he said, "The C-3 in a minute." Why? They were battle-hardened, they were experienced, they were up, they knew what was going on. The others were green as grass, just going over. Sure, they'd met certain hurdles that you have to jump through to make the C-1 qualification. But these categories are misleading; these categories don't really tell you what the capabilities of those units are. They're simply a way to direct you for resourcing prospectively.

Q Well, the numbers you cited yesterday -- 171,000 Iraqi security forces are trained -- you don't imply by that that they're ready to conduct operations on their own? I mean, can you put a caveat on those numbers so the public can understand?

SEC. RUMSFELD: We do. We've got all kinds of footnotes all over them. Some of them have just come out of training and they're green as grass. Some of them have been out six months or a year, and they're battle-hardened and very, very good. They're all different sizes and shapes and colors. Some are border patrols; they go out to a border position, they sit there and they guard the border. They do not have helicopters. They do not have the ability to move from the Syrian border to the Iranian border, nor do they need that. Some are police, and they're locals. And they guard the area, the precincts. They don't have the ability to fly from the north to the south. The special police commando units do.

So trying to get a single, simple answer for a complex situation where you have -- I'm going to guess -- 15 or 20 different categories of Iraqi security forces that have different purposes, different training, different equipment -- so the number is 171,500 currently, last time I looked, last week. But it's made up of apples and oranges. So it isn't useful to try to oversimplify.

And we have been very precise, we've been very accurate, we've footnoted in some instances these units. We know how many people are absent without leave. These units, we don't know because the Ministry of Interior in Iraq doesn't report it for that category of units. It's all very clear. There's no mystery to any of this.

Yes?

Q You've talked a lot lately about the Iraqi constitution and the need to get it written. And now that we're coming towards August 15th, it's really no longer hypothetical, it's happening. What is your view -- the Bush administration's view, your view, on whether or not a constitution based on Shari'a law, that would include any limitations on the rights of women in Iraq, is acceptable?

And since you seem to be taking multi-part questions today, very quickly I wanted --

SEC. RUMSFELD: I do not want to establish a precedent with it. Charlie -- Charlie was very aggressive.

Q Charlie -- (off mike).

SEC. RUMSFELD: I know. I've watched him. I tried to stop him. I failed.

Q You have a very definite audience here today, so I wanted to ask you -- the other question is -- what you really meant when you talked about terrorists being effective. That was not a word you usually use regarding this situation. So one is the constitution; two, your opening comment about terrorists being effective.

SEC. RUMSFELD: The constitution, the subject you've raised is a matter the Department of State and the White House are worrying through with the Iraqi people.

Q I'm sure it's something you're aware of, though.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Of course I'm aware, but it's not something that falls within the Department of Defense area of responsibility. I personally believe that any country that does not include half of their population in a reasonable way is making, A, a terrible mistake in terms of the future of that country and the prospects for that country and the opportunities for that country.

The word "effective" leapt out of my mouth, I suppose, because of the lethality of some of the attacks. It does not take a genius to kill innocent men, women and children.

So if you have a soldier out giving away candy to young Iraqi kids, and a suicide bomber straps a vest on, goes in, and kills eight or 10 of the kids and himself, and the soldier giving it out, that's effective -- what did he do? He killed a lot of people. And he killed one of ours and he killed nine, 10 children. So the lethality is there. Is it effective in terms of what they're trying to achieve? No. What you've got is a bunch of people, a lot of them foreigners -- including Zarqawi, who's a Jordanian -- in there killing Iraqis. They're now killing not just Shi'a, but they're killing Sunnis. And they're angering people in that country, because they realize that it's mindless carnage.

Q (Off mike) -- when you judge the insurgency, what's the trade-off in your minds between lethality, if you will, and numbers of attacks? You talk about numbers of attacks being down since the election, but yet you're also noting the lethality is still quite significant.

SEC. RUMSFELD: It is.

Q Is lethality growing? How do you -- how can -- how do you balance the two as you try and judge the level of the insurgency? What is your view on that?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I don't know that I'm going to answer that directly. The problem that happens is, every time someone's asked that question -- some general in the field, and then Casey is, or Abizaid is, or I am, or General Pace. Then everyone tries to parse the words and say, "oh, he said this word, yet someone else said that word; they don't agree."

And -- it is what it is. We report what it is. We know the numbers of civilians being killed by the violent extremists. And we also know that the people of Iraq are supporting the political process, that they are supporting the Iraqi security forces; they think highly of them. They're standing in line to join them. That -- as political or security force officials are assassinated, people step forward to take their positions.

And so I would say that the political progress and the economic progress and the security progress, all of which have to go forward together, are in fact moving forward, notwithstanding the fact that we can reasonably expect -- both in Afghanistan and in Iraq -- to see an increase of violence as they continue to move towards their political goals: in the case of Afghanistan, September 18th -- the provincial and the parliamentary elections, and in the case of Iraq, the referendum on October 15th for the constitution.

Q Can we get that statistic you just mentioned? That you have numbers on Iraqi civilians killed? Can you provide us with that, perhaps?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I don't know.

GEN. PACE: Of course, we're not maintaining a tally. We just see the reports --

SEC. RUMSFELD: We see the reports each day.

Q Oh, I'm sorry. I just -- (inaudible) --

SEC. RUMSFELD: It's -- you know, I don't have any added up. But each day, I mean, you -- people see the reports in the press: nine killed here, 11 killed there.

Yes?

Q Let me just ask you, earlier today the Army issued a report that is an assessment of mental health among soldiers in Iraq. And among the things it found was that a little over half of the soldiers said morale was low. The thing that bothered them the most was the length of deployment. I'm wondering if you have anything to offer on that subject of changing that?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, I'll have General Pace answer this. But the deployments vary from service to service. In the case of the Air Force, sometimes it's three months; in the case of the Marines it's been seven months; in the case of the Army it's been 12 months --

Q (Off mike.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, you said troops.

Q I'm sorry, I meant Army.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Okay. I've tried to get the Army to look at the length of the tours, and I think at some point down the road they will. At the present time, the combination of attempting to reset their force from the deployments and reorganize down to the brigade level is sufficiently complex that they do not want to interrupt it by changing the length of time.

GEN. PACE: Sir, I was just in Afghanistan last week, and out -- pretty far out into the mountains talking to some of our great Army soldiers who have been out there for almost a full tour. You look them in the eye and you ask them -- if you say to them, would they like to go home, the answer is of course they would. If you say to them: Do you understand the value of your service over here? They swell up with pride and they say yes, they do. And they do not want to come home until the job is done. They understand.

So, I haven't seen the report. But clearly, if you tone a question as to whether you'd rather be here sweaty and dirty and fighting, or be home, the answer's going to be, "I'd like to be home with my family."

But if you're asking -- if you ask them straightaway, look them in the eye and say, "How do you feel about the time you're spending here? Is this worth the time that you are spending?" they categorically will tell you that. Afghanistan -- they know there's another election coming up September 18th. U.S. soldiers there are proud of their contribution, just as those in Iraq are proud of the fact that there will be a referendum on October 15th and there'll be an election in December. That's irrefutable.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yes?

Q Mr. Secretary, if I can turn your attention to home, your department sent up a request -- a list of ideas to improve recruitment up to the Hill. And one of those things was increasing the maximum age for enlistees. I wonder if you can give us some sense of how many people you might be able to attract that way, and in the broader sense of things, how much of a difference will things like that make?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I can't. We know certain things. We know that people are living longer. And I

believe it's correct that one service at least has already raised the entry level by age.

(To staff member.) Is that not correct?

STAFF: They have a pilot program.

SEC. RUMSFELD: A pilot program. And they're testing and measuring to see what effect there might be with respect to adjusting the ages.

I also, you know, without any evidence to prove it, I think it would be desirable to increase the age that people are allowed to enter the service. I also think that we make a mistake in the military by having people automatically be forced out in the event that they may wish to stay in. And they're -- here you have people -- I frequently see people who are 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, who have served 20 years, and their circumstance is such that they're out. And I think that we have a lot of wonderfully talented men and women in uniform, and we ought to adjust how we manage that force to fit the 21st century.

(To General Pace.) Do you want to comment on it?

GEN. PACE: I've been a recruiter for three years in Buffalo, New York, and this is not about money and benefits; this is about message. If we let our young folks and middle-young folks know how much we appreciate their service to their country -- there are thousands and thousands of young men and women out there who want to serve this country. They want to know from their parents, they want to know from the media, they want to know from their government leaders that we value their service and what they are doing to provide freedom around the world. If we get that message to them, there will be plenty of folks enlisting.

Q Mr. Secretary --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Make this the last question.

Q -- you said earlier that the attitude of the Iraqi people was hardening against the attackers who carry out these suicide bombings, particularly those against children. But yet, how can the insurgents, the terrorists, the foreign fighters carry out these attacks, because presumably they need some indigenous support to do that?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, it's a big country. It's a country the size of California. It's got 25, 26, 27 million people. There are always going to be some modest fraction of the people that would like to have whatever exists not exist, and they can find support and sustainment in that. There's plenty of weapons in the country. There's -- how many people does it take?

But I think it would be a mistake to suggest that this insurgency has the support of the people, or that it has some sort of a -- that it's a movement that's popular. I mean, there's no Ho Chi Minh; there's no Mao Zedong. This is a foreigner, a Jordanian, who's in there organizing these attacks against every ethnic group they can successfully do, trying to create chaos and trying to have it fail -- that that country not become a democracy.

So the fact that they can find the kind of support that it takes to help bring in some suicide jackets -- vests and then go kill people, that's not a complicated task.

Q Did you say General Pace has been confirmed by the full Senate, Mr. Secretary?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I should have -- have you been confirmed?

GEN. PACE: I was last Friday.

Q Where have I been? Congratulations, General.

GEN. PACE: Thank you.

Q Welcome aboard.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Thank you, folks.

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