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Presenter: Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld

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Secretary Rumsfeld Media Availability Enroute to Iraq

Rumsfeld: We're enroute to Iraq. I, as you know, try to go in every two or three months and meet with the troops, and military commanders and with the leadership of the Iraqi government. [Inaudible] schedule of [inaudible].

Much [inaudible] to us. The United States and to the [inaudible] Iraqi government as they move towards their constitutional referendum and then elections under the new constitution.

We continue to – we feel it's important for them to work with their neighbors to see what the [inaudible] between Iran and Syria improves. It's been [inaudible] and Iraq is a [inaudible] country, but they live in that neighborhood, they're going to be in that neighborhood, and they need to be aggressively communicating with their neighbors to see that foreign terrorists stop coming across those borders and their neighbors do not harbor insurgents, in a way that is destructive [on] what the Iraqi people are trying to accomplish.

The other thing I would say is that we are in the process of working with the Iraqi government to get them to provide us with the numbers of people, Iraqis, to be trained to take over responsibility for the detainees in Iraq. They have to recognize the importance of that, provide us with people we can help train and organize and equip so that as soon as it's feasible we can transfer responsibility for Iraqi prisoners to the Iraqi government and with them having developed the criminal justice system so that they can retain, process, try, and take care of that important aspect of their country.

The other thing we're working on with the Iraqis, of course, is to see that we have all of the leader arrangements in place while there is an essential UN Resolution. That's the first [inaudible]. Technically these are things that will need to be done either between now and the time the new government comes in or [inaudible] the new government takes over in January of next year. And then [inaudible] working together to work out those arrangements so that they're in place in a timely fashion.

The other thing that's important is when the Iraqi government finds opportunities to thank the Coalition countries for the contributions they have made and are making. These Coalition countries showed a lot of political courage and a lot of personal courage to have their forces come into the country, some 25-30 countries

[inaudible], and a number of them paring down over the weeks and months ahead. Some are going to be transferring responsibility over to Iraqi security forces; others are going to be shifting their roles into the NATO train and equip function that is underway there, and it's important, we believe, for the Iraqi government to see that they recognize the important contributions the Coalition countries have and are making for their success.

Another subject of course that we'll bring up with the Iraqi [inaudible] is [inaudible] people committed a great deal of their human treasure and financial resources to the success of this effort, and other countries have as well, and we'll be working with the Iraqi government to try to encourage countries around the world to assist them with their needs [inaudible]. We'll be doing things with the Iraqis to encourage donor conferences and work with countries to see that they fulfill their donor pledges.

The only other thing I'd say is that the Iraqis have a budget, and there will be lots of demands on their budget, and it's probably a [inaudible] that they have allocated the proper amounts of funds to their security forces so that they have the capability as Coalition forces gear down over time to sustain an acceptable security environment and in fact be able to subdue over time the insurgency that exists in the country.

Media: [Inaudible].

Rumsfeld: Oh, I wouldn't say that. I think we have an obligation to look ahead, and we do that. That's what the public expects us to do. We look down the road and ask ourselves where do we have problems, and [inaudible]. We've started doing everything we could to see that there would be no delay in the constitutional drafting process five or six months ago, and we're still working on that. We don't want any delays. We think it's terribly important that the Iraqi people feel that they have their own constitution, that it's a legitimate constitution, that they've had a referendum on it and that would be enormously important in their having a stake in their country and seeing what the political and the economic progress is for [working] [inaudible] the insurgency, and making [inaudible] for the insurgents to be successful.

Media: How important is that, Mr. Secretary, with the [inaudible] delay?

Rumsfeld: I feel very strongly about it. It would be very harmful [inaudible]. It's necessary. We have troops on the ground there. People are getting killed. And the faster they're able to proceed in an orderly way with their constitution, sometimes it's a compromise – that's what politics is about. And people are simply going to have to recognize that in a constitutional [inaudible] process compromise is necessary, it's important, it's understandable, it's the way democratic systems work.

Further, I would say that the -- The [inaudible] who [inaudible], who [inaudible] in which more time was allowed, just like [inaudible]. You don't want the [inaudible] end. You want to extend [inaudible]. Life isn't like that. [Inaudible] Sometimes you have to make a compromise that's necessary and get on with it. Our constitution's been amended many many times and their constitution will be amended. To the extent that they end up with a constitution that's voted on in a referendum and two, three, four, five, six, ten years down the road they decide they want to amend it, that'll be their privilege. But now's the time to get on with it - political progress is necessary to defeat the insurgency; economic progress is necessary to defeat the insurgency. This is not a purely military operation. All of these things have to go through together.

Media: [Inaudible]?

Rumsfeld: We've sent I think three or four different assessment teams in the last few years, every six months or so, to ask that question and they've come back with recommendations. Circumstances change on the ground. The governments change, they develop different views. We have the Governing Council to start with and the Interim Government and now the transitional government. We'll have still another government in January after the constitutional elections take place. Each time they get the facts and make adjustments and change the budget around and increase or decrease the numbers of forces in different categories, and they're working diligently. Our folks are, the Iraqi people are, the Iraqi ministries are. So there will continue to be adjustments as we go along. The Iraqi security forces are doing a very good job. They're taking losses which suggests they don't sit around in the barracks. They're out there providing security.

Media: [Inaudible]?

Rumsfeld: When they're ready. [Inaudible] abilities.

Media: [Inaudible]?

Rumsfeld: [Inaudible]. It is not knowable. The question keeps getting asked and I keep trying to explain that life is not linear. Life is not static. It's dynamic. And what are the elements that will determine the answer to your question? The elements are the lower the insurgency, the decline of [inaudible]; the level of cooperation or lack of cooperation from Syria and Iran [inaudible] with their efforts to destabilize the situation in Iraq. Does it increase or decrease?

Third, the [attitude] of the Iraqi people which will be determined on the progress that is made with respect to the political progress and the economic progress. You expect to receive progress in those important fields obviously [inaudible]. [Inaudible] support for the government and away from support or tolerance of the insurgency.

Fourth would be the progress that's made in the Iraqi security forces. Not just numerically, but qualitatively. How fast can the ministries be developed and strengthened? How fast can cooperation between the Ministry of Defense Forces and the Ministry of Interior Forces take place? [Inaudible] each other? How fast can they develop the ability to share intelligence or develop intelligence from the Iraqi people?

So there are multiple factors, none of them are static, and they all interplay to determine what the answer to your question will be.

I simply am not wise enough, nor do I know of a single soul who's wise enough to answer that question.

Media: [Inaudible] the Iraqi government [inaudible]?

Rumsfeld: I think they need [inaudible]. They're a big country, they're a [inaudible] country. They will be around a long time and they don't like it.

Media: How [inaudible]?

Rumsfeld: I'll leave that to them.

Media: [Would you encourage them in that direction]?

Rumsfeld: [Inaudible].

Media: [Inaudible]?

Rumsfeld: [Inaudible] lawyers working on all of this. They have been for five or six months, and what you need is as you go from the period where the United States is in charge to a period where you have the Iraqi Governing Council, to the period now where they're [inaudible] many, many months ago [inaudible] a new constitution, and then ultimately a new government, what you have to do is constantly rearrange your legal circumstance [inaudible] situation. We've been operating under a UN Security Council Resolution. We may very well have, they may decide to extend the resolution in some way, if that's the preference of the Iraqi government. We may end up with a status of forces agreement which we have with dozens and dozens and dozens of countries around the world. We're sorting through those things as to how they're to be arranged.

One of the things we're doing very successfully is we're shifting our weight, the U.S. military has been shifting its weight away from essentially doing counter-terrorism activity and security patrols to continuing to do heavy lifting in terms of the counter-insurgency and doing more and more of our work directly with Iraqi security forces. Not just training and equipping them, but operating with them, and embedding our forces with them in ways that we are able to do more mentoring and provide that kind of assistance to them which is systematically increasing their effectiveness.

Media: [Inaudible] long term [inaudible]?

Rumsfeld: That's a question we'll have to think about. My guess is you wouldn't even begin to think about something like that until you had a new Iraqi government. You wouldn't want to do it with an interim government. And I have no idea what [inaudible] Iraqi government's feelings would be on that, nor do I have any idea what our views would be on that. It's premature.

Media: [Inaudible] compromise. Do you think [inaudible]?

Rumsfeld: I think all of the elements will have to recognize it's in their best interest to have a single country, that protects the rights of all of the various elements in the country. [That's at] peace with its neighbors, and [inaudible] rights of all of it's citizens. [Inaudible] And as far as the details go, I'm going to leave it to them [inaudible]. They're going to have to have an Iraqi solution [Inaudible] because they have to live with it.

Media: [Inaudible]?

Rumsfeld: The same resolutions that people have to work out, and obviously the new Iraqi government will want to have the respect of the international community and therefore would want to be able to manage the detainees in a manner that the international community would feel is appropriate.

Thank you, folks.

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