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

**Wednesday, July 27, 2005**

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## **Secretary Rumsfeld COSCOM Town Hall Meeting in Balad, Iraq**

Rumsfeld: Thank you very much.

General Fontaine, General Vines, troops, volunteers all, it's terrific to be with you.

General Vines, you made it sound like I can't hold a job. [Laughter].

I am really delighted to be here, and to all of you gathered here and to those who are out on duty but stationed here, let me begin by conveying an important message to each of you. The American people and I are profoundly grateful to each of you for your service, for your sacrifice, and I should add we're grateful also to your family and loved ones who sacrifice as well. They recognize, I think, that you folks are begin called on to do things that we've really never asked U.S. forces to do before: to simultaneously be warriors, humanitarians, diplomats. Even in many cases well outside of your own specialty and in many cases outside of your own service branch. From pharmacists to fighter pilots, you are serving with professionalism, with dedication, and I might add, with good humor. That's in the hallmark of the American fighting men and women through the decades.

I think of men like Senior Airman Douglas Bachelor. Is he here? I'm told that back in November of 2003 he was wounded in a rocket attack just a few hours after arriving in Iraq. After five surgeries and 18 months of recovery he chose to stay in the Air Force and indeed he returned to Iraq and now fixes armaments used for the 64th Helicopter Maintenance Unit here on this base, and I thank you for it.

[Applause].

You folks are really making the extraordinary seem routine. There are Airmen manning gun trucks for Army supply convoys I'm told, there are mechanics from the 732nd Expeditionary Mission Support Group armoring up vehicles for the Army. And I'm told that in 72 man-hours, Air Force mechanics can strip down and re-armor a five-ton truck and send it out the gate ready for action. A NASCAR pit crew could hardly do any better.

The doctors, the nurses and other medical personnel of the 332nd Expeditionary Medical Group are providing care that I'm told is comparable to the finest medical facilities in the world and they're doing it here in the middle of Iraq.

Through your work you have touched the lives of thousands of people, certainly your fellow Americans. You know that. They follow so closely what you're doing. But also the Iraqi people and even Iraqi children, those who live just beyond the gates of this base. You have reached out to them, I'm told, with kindness and generosity and compassion that they'll carry with them the rest of their lives. I know that because over the years I've met any number of people who were living in war zones in World War II who were befriended by American servicemen and women whose lives were touched and they never forgot it.

So those relationships are important, and nowhere more so than here in this part of the world.

I say that because this conflict at its core is really much more than a military battle. In a major sense it's an ideological campaign, it's a struggle. It's a struggle between extremists and moderates within that religion. It's a test of wills, to be sure. It's also a struggle between hatred and hope.

From time to time I've had to remind people in the United States that America is not what's wrong with the world. Those who behead people, those who murder innocent men, women and children, are what's wrong with the world.

It's amazing to me that anyone would have to say that, but I must say, given what I hear in Washington it's clear that that must be said and it must be said again and again.

Think about what happened in a Baghdad neighborhood just a few weeks ago. Some U.S. soldiers I'm told had stopped their HMMWV and in a sight that's become familiar the world over, some children flocked around the HMMWV and flocked around the soldiers, and seconds later a suicide bomber plowed into the gathering killing that soldier and over twenty Iraqi children.

So much has been left out about what is at stake here. Imagine the kind of a world we would leave to our children and grandchildren if we allow those people, the perpetrators of those massacres and others like them, to have their way.

The extremists having failed every one of their major objectives are reduced to slaughtering increasingly innocent Iraqi men, women and children. They have the hope of bending the survivors to their will. But thanks to you, the terrorists are far from achieving their goals. To be sure, suicide bombings continue today. And I must say that the violence continues they're going to get larger headlines here and around the world.

The deadline for drafting the new Iraqi constitution is drawing near, August 15th. I just met with the leaders who are in the process of trying to pull together the diverse elements in this country to fashion a constitution, something they have no experience doing. A piece of paper that will protect each of the various elements from each other and they have great confidence that they will succeed by August 15th.

But as in the past when the Iraqi people have approached a major milestone along this difficult path toward democracy and self-governance, the attacks from the terrorists have increased, and I suspect we may

very well see that between now and the October 15th date when the new constitution is scheduled to be voted on, and then the elections to be held, I believe, on December 15th, later this year.

But if history has shown us anything, it's that suicide attacks whether by the extremists in Iraq today or by kamikaze pilots over the Pacific Ocean 60 years ago, are not really a sign of strength. They are a sign of weakness, and to some extent a sign of desperation. The Zarkawis and the bin Ladens just as the fascists and the fanatics before them have really nothing to offer but death, so they try to destroy things that they couldn't build and they try to kill the people that they can't persuade.

The mission of the Multinational Coalition in Iraq, the mission that you are leading here is to help create an environment where the democratically elected Iraqi government and the Iraqi security forces can contain and ultimately defeat the insurgents. It will not be easy. I know that all of you endure the heat, separation from your families, occasional mortar rounds even inside the compound. A young man who works on this base, I'm told, put it this way when he was interviewed, he said, "It's the hardest job I ever had, and it's also the most important job I've ever had." He has it right.

You're part of a mission that has liberated some 50 million people between Afghanistan and Iraq. You've liberated them from a life of terror, repression and despotism. You're helping to build a future where pride and dignity come from building and creating things instead of destroying them. Your work is important work. It's noble work. It's work that will benefit the future generations of Americans to be sure, and it's work that will not be forgotten.

I thank each of you for your service to our country and to your fellow citizens.

Now I'll answer some questions.

[Applause and Hooahs].

Rumsfeld: And I bet General Vines right down in the front row and I'm going to haul him up here if you ask me any tough ones because I've had a long day and I'm an old man. [Laughter].

Question: Sir, Sergeant Major --

Rumsfeld: Where did you get that haircut, Sergeant Major? [Laughter].

Question: Right here on Anaconda, Sir.

Rumsfeld: What did you pay for it?

Question: Three dollars, sir.

Rumsfeld: It looks like it.

[Applause].

Rumsfeld: I like it.

Question: It would be gray like yours Sir if I didn't shave it off, sir. [Laughter].

Sir, my name is Sergeant Major [Pritsing] and I'm with the 1st Team. My question is of all the naysayers out there that think we need to pull out of Iraq, what can we do in the military to convince our public that we are making significant progress in both Iraq and in the global war on terrorism and that we have to remain committed to this important mission?

[Hooahs and Applause].

Rumsfeld: Sergeant Major, you're right. You are making progress here in Iraq, in Afghanistan, and certainly in the global war on terror. Pressure is being put on the terrorists and the terrorist networks, and those countries that are providing havens for terrorists all across the globe. Everything they do is harder today than it was. It's harder to talk to each other, it's harder to move, it's harder to raise money, it's harder to recruit, it's harder to retain people. The reality, however, is that terrorists of course can attack at any time, any place, and it's impossible to defend at every time and every place. So our task is to go after them where they are. The progress that is being made is measurable and solid.

The only way I can answer your question is to keep using every means of communication you have. Think of it. You've got e-mail, you've got phones, you can write, you've got digital cameras -- you two both have digital cameras, I can see. [Laughter]. And ultimately the truth will come out.

You know the American people are amazing, if you think of somewhat less than 300 years of history. We staked everything on the idea that free people given sufficient information will find their way to the right decisions. That was an enormous gamble when it was made and it's worked. It has worked.

To be sure, in a wave of emotion people can get pushed to one side or a view can take place that really isn't the true view, but people have an inner gyroscope. They have a good mooring lines, and they come back to center. And if we keep saying what the truth is and we keep doing our jobs, by golly, they'll figure it out and they'll be supportive and you can count on it.

[Hooahs and Applause].

Question: Good afternoon, Sir. I'm CW4 [Van Denning] also from the 1st Team out of Bragg.

My question Sir, is with regards to BRAC. Provided that the recommendations are approved, when do you think we'll start seeing those things implemented, especially at Fort Bragg and Pope Air Force Base?

Rumsfeld: The BRAC is the Base Closing and Realignment Commission, which was passed by Congress, and it required that the military services then put forward recommendations to realign and adjust our base structure in the United States to conform to the 21st Century. They did that, and presented it to me. Not you're your first choice. I looked at it and it became very clear that if I did anything and started pulling one string out it would unravel things, and so I sent it to the Base Closing Commission. They have it now. Then it goes to

the President, then it goes to the Congress, and they will vote it up or down.

It will play out over as many as I believe six years, six to eight years, because it takes time to fund it and to make those arrangements. So it won't happen immediately. It is designed, of course, to adjust the force structure to take account of the force protection needs that exist today, to see that we're arranged in a more joint way, all based on military necessity.

I suspect what you'll see is the roll-out will be a mixture of things that cost less up front mixed with some things that cost more up front so that over the period of the number of years that it takes to roll it out the costs and the expenses will kind of cancel each other out over the early period with a modest decrement, and the at some point begins to save many many many billions of dollars which can then be moved into quality of life and procurement, which is needed.

Thank you.

[Applause].

Question: Good afternoon, sir. I'm Sergeant Major Fillmore from 1st Corps Support Command.

Currently, the Sergeants Major and senior officers are required to retire at 30 years of active federal service.

Rumsfeld: I think that's ridiculous.

Question: Yes, sir. Some of us agree.

Rumsfeld: Of course at my age I have to say that. [Laughter]. But I do. I can't imagine people at the top of their game retiring when they're 38 or 40 or 45 or even 73. [Laughter].

Question: Well to support deployment, Sir, we currently have to put in a request to Human Resources Command to stay past that 30 years point. My question is, is the Army looking at changing the mandatory retirement date for Sergeants Major and senior officers?

Rumsfeld: If they're not, they ought to be and I will look into it. I've talked to Dr. David Chu, who is the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, and I've told him that I thought given the fact of medical care today and health and the fact that people live so much longer, that we ought to increase the age at which people can enter if they'd like to, and we ought to increase the age at which people can retire if people would prefer to stay on. And it just stuns me to see a 38 or 40 year old come up to me and say that it's up or out and I'm gone when they're terrific, fine, servicemen and women.

Thank you.

[Applause].

Question: Mr. Secretary, Air Force Captain Michael Mandary from the 332nd Expeditionary Mission Support Group.

My question is looking at Germany and Japan how would you --

Rumsfeld: Go a little slower. The acoustics in here are imperfect and I've got an aviator's ear.

Question: Looking at Germany and Japan, how would you compare the results of the Allies actions after World War II with the Coalition efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq?

Rumsfeld: Well -- [Laughter]. No one likes to read history any more it seems, but the fact is everything we did after World War II in Japan and Germany and Italy took so much longer, was so much more difficult. The thought that in Afghanistan within a matter of months you end up with a popularly elected President for the first time in 5,000 years in that country. Now they're getting ready for parliamentary elections and provincial elections on September 18th. The economy's booming, the refugees have returned home. There's still some violence. The Taliban and the Al Qaeda are still killing people from time to time, but the country is doing very very well.

This country has many more advantages that Afghanistan does not have. It has water resources, which you have seen, it has oil, it has an educated population, skillful population. It has a history of [inaudible] women, and I've never understood how a country can think they can function in the world by telling half of their population they shouldn't participate.

So this country has everything going for it. It is a big country, it's an important country. And that is one of the reasons that the terrorists are so determined to keep it from becoming a democracy, to keep it from being successful. That's why the fight will be vicious and tough.

But the history books record that it took many years in Germany to achieve the kinds of things -- get schools open and a stock market functioning and a new currency and new textbooks, and all of those things which have been done in both Afghanistan and Iraq. So the work that you all are doing is important work. It historically will be seen as work that has been done well, notwithstanding all the difficulties, and there are difficulties. Don't get me wrong. I don't want to paint a pretty picture here, because I know it's a tough business that you all are in doing but I think that history will look back on this with 20/20 hindsight which people who have their nose pressed against the window every day trying to meet a deadline don't have.

[Hooahs and Applause].

Question: Good afternoon, sir.

Rumsfeld: You had the same barber. [Laughter].

Question: My name is PFC Blunt. I'm from the 183<sup>rd</sup> Maintenance Company.

Mr. Secretary, my question is with the armed forces fighting two major battles -- one here and the war on terror. and many other missions around the world --

Rumsfeld: I'm sorry, the acoustics are so bad, you're going to have to get a little closer to the mic and speak slower for me.

Question: My question is, with the armed forces fighting two major battles, one here and also the war on terror and many other missions around the world, how well prepared are we to defend America, Mr. Secretary?

Rumsfeld: It's a fair question and when one looks at the things our forces are doing in Bosnia, recently, in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and here, on the Horn of Africa, our deployments in South Korea, Japan. One has to look at that and say how can we do all of this? Let me try to put it all in perspective.

First of all, the facts. The fact is that we can do all of this. The Joint Chiefs of Staff have an obligation to review continuously our contingency plans and our war plans and the kinds of things that could occur in the world that we might be called upon to do something about. They do that regularly and they regularly report to me that we have those capabilities.

If you put it into perspective, we have 1.4 million men and women on active duty in uniform. Set aside the Guard and Reserve for a moment. We have 137,000 in Iraq. We have less than 200,000 in the entire AOR of CENTCOM. 200,000 out of 1.4 million – plus we have the Guard and the Reserve.

Now the problem we have and the reason we see stresses on the force is not because we have an inability to meet the kind of commitments that have occurred, it's because the usability of our forces is not what it ought to be. The organization of our forces is not what it ought to be. We are in the process, as you know, of doing a variety of things to reduce the frequency that people would have to deploy, for example. We're taking within the Guard and Reserve and rearranging skill sets so we have more of the ones we need and fewer of the ones we don't need as much. We're doing the same thing on the active force. Changing skill sets.

In addition we are in the process of changing skill sets as between the active force and the Guard and Reserve.

The third, it's estimated by people who do these calculations, that we have something like 300,000 men and women in uniform today currently doing things that civilians can do. So what we've done is over time allow uniformed personnel to slide into tasks and activities that are interesting and can be done by military people but need not be done by military people. And we've been in the process of moving some of the military people out of those types of activities and into activities that more closely approximate the kinds of things an individual who volunteers to serve in the military expected to do when they stuck up their hand and said send me.

So we have, I sat down one day two and a half years ago, I believe, and wrote a memorandum where I listed, I'm told something like 41 or 42 different things that the Department needed to do to get rearranged to fit the 21st Century, all of which have the effect of reducing the so-called stress on the force. One of them is lengthening tours modestly which reduces the numbers of permanent changes of station that a person would have in their career, which reduces the number of times their kids are going to get be hauled out of high school and grammar school and put in another school, and the number of times their spouses have to change jobs. There will still be permanent changes of station, to be sure, but if you just make a modest change in the tour length it will end up significantly reducing the total number of permanent changes of station.

So we've got a lot of those things taking place. The bottom line is that we do have the capability to fulfill the commitments of our country.

Now you said something a little different. You said, in effect, defend our homeland. There are several ways to do that. One way is through force protection, and we have to do that. I remember when I was President Reagan's Middle East Envoy and I spent a lot of time in the Middle East in Lebanon and Beirut and you'll recall a suicide truck driver drove into the barracks and killed 241 Marines. So we started putting barricades around everything. Then they started lobbing rocket-propelled grenades over the barricades. So I went down to the Corniche in Beirut and sure enough, they had hung wire mesh over one of the buildings and tried to bounce off the rocket-propelled grenades. So the next thing the terrorists did was they started shooting at soft targets -- people going back and forth to work. The point being, the way to defend is not simply to defend. It is to attack and go after.

[Applause and Hooahs].

Question: Sir, PFC Christianson with Bravo Company [Inaudible].

I was just wondering, Sir, is the Army, are they implementing any programs to help the exploding divorce rate among active duty soldiers?

Rumsfeld: The answer is yes, although I don't want to answer it quite that way because I don't have data that tells me there is an exploding divorce rate among active duty. You may well be correct. But I do know that -- any of those indicators, whether it's suicide rate or a divorce rate or an accident rate, we look on them, the services do, it's their responsibility. They implement programs to assist people and they -- do know the data for sure that there is an -- you referenced active duty Army.

Question: Sir, it was in the Army Times. They had a story about it. They said in the last two years it had jumped eighty percent.

Rumsfeld: Well, I wouldn't want to suggest that there might have been something written that wasn't exactly correct. [Laughter]. But I will get that article and look at it. It may very well be that the article doesn't say that at all, the headline says it, and I just don't know. But I do know that there is a concern about all of those indicators and the services do watch them as they must. But thank you for raising it. I'll check.

[Applause].

Question: Sir, Major Moody of [inaudible].

I have a question, sir, on the [inaudible] great program, and we all appreciate it. Something that could be done to help it be even better and for our families is that the current 15 days that soldiers are allocated for R&R is chargeable leave. Is it possible that DoD could take a look at that and make it non-chargeable leave, so that those days could be used post-deployment wise to spend time with their families and lessen impacts of repeated deployments?

[Hooahs and Applause].

Rumsfeld: I'm glad the program's working. [Laughter]. It is a big deal to take all the folks, and as I recall it's still two weeks, or 15 days...

Question: 15 Days, Sir.

Rumsfeld: And involve transportation there and transportation back. General Vines, do we still have the program where people also are able to get away for a weekend occasionally?

Vines: Yes, sir, but a 100 percent. We just can't get there from here. So some of these people have had it, some will not have that opportunity, sir.

Rumsfeld: We have a rule, and I won't belabor this but I think it's important for people to understand. There's nothing more important than the people in the armed services. This is a fact, we know that. That is the greatest asset that our country has.

The reality is that one has to look at the cost of personnel, and try to see that you balance the things so that you can attract and retain the people you need to make this military what it is, the greatest military on the face of the earth. And the way you do that, it's part of what a person gets paid, it's partly the benefits, it's partly health care, it's partly what kind of a retirement arrangement might there be, it's partly what kind of educational opportunities might there be, it's partly the way that families are treated because they are a critically important part of an all-volunteer service. And one has to – before answering the kind of a question that you pose. One has to look at what is that potential cost balanced against the potential costs of some other benefit? And trying to then manage that arrangement of all of those benefits and incentives and inducements to people to make it attractive for them to come in, to try to balance them so that you end up with the right mix of people for the right period of years, and that they feel that they have been properly treated, properly rewarded, during their service and after their service.

And what's happened, to be honest, and it's worrisome, is that people get good ideas, and someone in the Congress will then pass an amendment, and it will pass because people don't like to say no. It's much more fun to give than to take. So it passes, and then we have to look at it and balance it against what's the cost. And then we see there is an inequity because that mainly took care of this group of people but it didn't take care of that group of people. So then you have to do that. And it all ratchets up and. You have to be careful. You have to be careful that you haven't created the wrong mix of incentives and you end up not being able to attract and retain the people you need and must have to defend our country.

So the short answer to your question is: I'd have to look at it as a senior official of the Department and balance it against all other things. Let's see some hooahs and everything for that!

[Hooahs and Applause].

Rumsfeld: All right.

This is the last question if I like it. If I don't, I'll take one more. [Laughter].

Question: Mr. Secretary, I'm Sergeant Nehigian, from the 9<sup>th</sup> Finance Battalion.

I read your recent interview in Esquire Magazine, and based on the transformation, the details of it that you were talking about, if and when we do this, what we have done in Iraq again, will we go into this as partners, with other nations beforehand? And also are we going to set up details like security for museums and other civil institutions as well, before we enter a country.

Rumsfeld: Well first, let me say that we have several coalitions. The nature of the world today is that no country can do things alone. There are just so many things that you can't do alone as a nation -- even the United States of America. We simply have to work with other countries.

We have the largest coalition in the history of mankind in the global war on terror -- something over 80 or 90 countries. We have a very large Coalition in Afghanistan. It was not enormous at the outset. We'd just lost 3,000 people in the United States and we felt we had to act before we were hit again and so within a matter of weeks we were operating in Afghanistan, half a world way in a land-locked country. We ended up, today I think we've got something like 32 or so coalition partners, including NATO and including assistance from the UN.

In Iraq we have a coalition, I think I'm going to guess it's probably close to 28, 26-28 countries today. It's a large coalition. And there have been people who have denigrated that coalition for political reasons. They have gone around saying oh, that's a small country, or they only have a small number of troops and that's true. A number of the countries do have a small number of troops. On the other hand, it takes a lot of political courage for a country to step up and join the coalition in Afghanistan or the global war on terror or the coalition in Iraq. It also takes personal courage on the part of their soldiers and sailors and marines and airmen.

So I guess the answer to your question is I don't know what a future President will decide. My guess is the facts will determine it. And if it requires immediate action then I suspect that any President of either political party will act. If a situation provides sufficient leisure, that they can take two months, six months, 12 months, whatever it takes to fashion a coalition. I don't think any coalition of any size will satisfy everybody. Some still won't like it. They'll say it's too small or there aren't enough troops or that country's not tough enough or, they don't do it the way we do it.

The reality is there are very few countries on the face of the earth that can act as quickly as we're capable of. When the tsunami struck, for example, it was the United States that was able to move the most rapidly because of the investment the taxpayers have made and because of the sustaining of those forces and the skill of those people. And lives were saved because of that.

In the case of Liberia or Haiti, we were able to do things very quickly because we have competent people. We also were able to pass it off to the UN in the case of Haiti very rapidly.

Now, you also talked about will we have enough people to protect the museums. The answer again is I don't know. It will be fact-based. But the combatant commanders have to make judgments about things like that. They have to -- there was a lot of press, as some of you may not know about the looting of the museum in Baghdad. Any one who cares about history, obviously cares about antiquities and the news stories went on and

on. I look at the combatant commanders and [inaudible] what were they doing. Well, they were fighting a war. They were trying not to get killed. They were trying to take Baghdad. They were worried about [inaudible] blown. They were worried about mass refugees. They were worried about [inaudible]. There were a thousand things that they had to do to protect civilian lives and ensure that there wasn't a Fortress Baghdad and they did, in my view they did a superb job.

[Hooahs and Applause].

Now I'll tell you one other thing. , We -- and I liked the question so I'll make it the last one.

We had the benefit of some inside visibility in Baghdad prior to the war. And I talked to one of the individuals who was inside Baghdad prior to the war, and he went to that museum. And that museum had already been emptied out before the war ever started. The curators of the museums when they know a war is coming aren't stupid, and they take things and they move them. And they put them in places they can be protected. And the stories that suggested there were hundreds of thousands of pieces of antiquities that were looted, I'm told, not the case. There may have been some inside looting by people inside the museums, because some of the pieces ended up in Tokyo and some of the ended up in London. But most of them were in safekeeping.

I guess I'm not going to fault the combatant commanders or the troops that came into Baghdad and spent their time trying to find the enemy, and root them out and trying to find Saddam Hussein and his sons and the people who had killed over 100,000 people here in this country, filling mass graves. I'm not going to fault them because of the museums.

Thank you, folks.

[Hooahs and Applause].

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