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

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**Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld Radio Interview with Samir Nader, Radio SAWA, Middle East Broadcasting Networks**

Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld Radio Interview with Samir Nader, Radio SAWA, Middle East Broadcasting Networks

NADER: Mr. Secretary, thank you so much for your time and for speaking with Radio SAWA today.

I would like to start, so we won't waste much time, by asking you about reports about U.S. plans to start withdrawing U.S. troops from Iraq beginning next year after the elections. Is this the case?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: No. The report that was put out by, I believe AP, has since been retracted. They simply made a mistake.

What was announced yesterday by the Pentagon was the normal troop redeployment and deployment where we currently have troops in Iraq, and after a year, they flow out over a three or four or five month period, and troops go in to replace them over that same three or four or five month period, and one of the reporters just simply made a big mistake and reported it to the contrary.

NADER: I see. What's your expectations for the aftermath of the coming elections in Iraq? Will the security improve? Will that make it easier to maybe withdraw any troops?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Well, I think what will happen is we will end up -- We normally have about 138,000 troops in Iraq, and that's kind of the baseline. We're going to increase it up around, to 160,000 over the election period, around December 15th. Then it would go back down to 138,000, plus or minus, and at that point we would take a look at the results of the election, and the security situation, and the progress of the Iraqi security forces, and as President Bush has said, it will be a conditioned-based program where we will then make a judgment as to what the commanders on the ground feel is an appropriate level. And to the extent it needs to stay where it is, it will stay where it is. And to the extent they believe it can be reduced, it will be reduced.

Our goal, obviously, is to reduce the coalition forces in Iraq and keep handing over responsibility to the

Iraqi Security Forces that are now up over 210,000.

NADER: And for after the elections, what's your expectation? Do you see this is going to help improving the security situation?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: I do think so. I think that what we will have seen is three elections in less than one year. Each one will be successful. I would guess there will be a higher turnout on December 15th than in any of the previous two. We'll see the Sunnis participating to a greater extent. They will be voting for a national assembly, a parliament, a congress, based on a constitution that they fashioned and then voted for at the polls, and I think that at that stage, it will be pretty clear to everyone in Iraq, that anyone who is going out blowing up buildings and killing innocent Iraqi people, are not opposing the coalition. What they would be opposing is the Iraqi people, and the Iraqi government, and the Iraqi constitution. I don't think the Iraqi people are going to have a lot of tolerance for that kind of behavior, and I think they'll turn people in who do that, and I think we'll see a better environment post-election.

NADER: What's your reaction to the press reports making an issue about U.S. having secret prisons abroad, if you don't mind?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Well, the Department of Defense does not have any secret prisons abroad. Our prisons are well known to the International Committee of the Red Cross, we have humane treatment throughout the world in our prisons, and so I don't have any information on that at all.

NADER: How do you assess the new strategy in fighting, defeating the insurgency? Is it working? Are insurgents returning to towns after they clean them out?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Well, the insurgents have brains, and they look to see weak spots, and what they do is when we find them, we go after them and capture or kill them, and to the extent that they find a weakness somewhere in the country, they go and try to take advantage of that. Throughout the history of warfare and insurgency it's always been so. For every action they take, we watch what they do and adapt our tactics, techniques and procedures, and too do they.

NADER: Is there any improvement in Syria and Iran's attitude toward supporting the insurgencies?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: No, not that I've seen. Neither one is helpful. Both are unhelpful.

NADER: We have Operation Steel -- I mean you have Operation Steel Curtain going on on the border with Syria. The Washington Post had the report yesterday saying that you asked Central Command to prepare war plans inside Syria. Do you expect this operation, if necessary, to go in Syria after the insurgents?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: We have no plans to do that. My impression is that there's plenty of pressure on the Syrian government at the present time, and that they are not serving themselves well to be permitting the flow of insurgents and anti-Iraqi people across their border, and that they'd be well advised to stop permitting it.

NADER: I see. How much progress has been made on training Iraqi forces to handle their own responsibilities on their own, and why is this taking so long?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: [Laughing]. First of all, it's not taking so long. It's been two and a half years, and we've gone from zero to 210,000 Iraqi Security Forces trained and equipped. They are every day and every week taking over more and more responsibility for the security in the country. The activities out in Al Ambar Province involve a large number of Iraqi forces.

At the present time, if you go back to the last election on October 15th, for the referendum of the constitution, the Iraqi security forces provided almost all of the security for that election, and they'll be providing almost all the security for the December 15th election.

They're getting bigger and better equipped and better trained and more professional every single day, and as a result, they're taking over more and more responsibilities every day.

NADER: Is this having any impact on improving efforts in reconstruction?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Well, you know, it doesn't take a genius to go blow up something, so it's always possible for someone to go out and do that or to kill somebody. Look at the cities all across the world. There are hundreds of people, homicides every year in these cities, and there's damage done. Look at what's happening in Paris and France. People can blow things up relatively easily. It takes time and effort to build them, but the short answer is, you bet. To the extent you've got 210,000 Iraqi Security Forces in that country -- police, border patrol, army, special police battalions, counter-terrorist units and the like -- clearly it's going to improve security in the country.

NADER: Mr. Secretary, what impact in your opinion an Iraq, democratic state of Iraq, is going to influence or have an impact on the whole region?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Well, I think you should look at it both ways. On the one hand if Iraq were turned over to the terrorists, the Zarkawis, the people who chop off people's heads -- here's a country that's wealthy, it has oil, it has water, it has intelligent people, it has an important history. It would be a disaster for that region.

To the extent that Iraq is as I believe it will be in the period ahead, a single country, at peace with its neighbors, that's democratic, respectful of all the different elements within it, it will have a transforming effect in the region, I believe. It will be a terrific thing for the world. They are well on the path to achieve that.

NADER: Are you satisfied by the help the U.S. is getting in Iraq from countries like Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab League?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: No, I'm not. I think there's more they could have been doing, and I think there's more they should be doing, and I believe that we'll be seeing them do more in the period ahead. I think there was a certain amount of standing back and seeing how it would come out. I think it's pretty clear now how it's going to come out, and I think those countries have been, in the last six months, correction, in the last three or four months, they have seen the progress that's being made politically, and I think they've decided to encourage their fellow Sunnis to participate in the election, and become a participant in the country, in the success of the country.

NADER: The Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister is visiting Washington, Mr. Chalabi. Do you have any

plans to meet with him?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: I met with Abdelhadi the former Finance Minister who's now Deputy President. I met with him very recently and had good visits, and I believe Mr. Chalabi is coming to town and may very well be stopping in at the Pentagon.

NADER: Thank you so much, Mr. Secretary. That's all our time we have, and I thank you so much for talking with us at Radio SAWA here.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Thank you very much. I enjoyed talking to you. I look forward to seeing you again.

NADER: I would like to do that.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: thank you.

NADER: Thanks, sir. Thank you so much.