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Presenter: Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld

December 23, 2005

Secretary Rumsfeld Fallujah Townhall Meeting

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SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Thank you very much. Thank you so much. Please be seated.

General Johnson, thank you so much for your hospitality. Marines, Soldiers, I'm told there's some SEABEES, some Navy folks here --

[Hooahs].

How about Airmen?

[Inaudible]

Louder.

[Laughter].

I guess there's contractors and civilians and some other folks.

I did want, as General Johnson said, to be here today to personally recognize the superb job you folks are doing. It is noted across the world, and it's appreciated, and certainly I want to tell you, each of you, how grateful we are for your service, your sacrifice, and for your commitment to a truly historic cause.

And to tell you how grateful your country is to you. Also your families and loved ones. And how proud the American people are of what you are achieving here.

Consider where we are today. The Fallujah of not that long ago was a symbol of rejection of the new democratic Iraq. Difficult days lie ahead to be sure, but the Fallujah today has some of the highest voter registration and

turnout rates in the country, has increasingly capable and competent Iraq security forces in the streets helping to maintain order and hunting down terrorists. Fallujah is a place where the old adage about the U.S. Marines certainly fits -- no better friend, no worse enemy.

So I congratulate you for what you are accomplishing here. It's important.

Consider as well what's happening across Iraq. Last week the world watched with admiration and respect the Iraqis who defied threats to write a new chapter in the history of freedom. Last week's election with the surprisingly strong turnout across the country, even in this area, is still another step forward for the Iraqi people. I certainly congratulate General Casey and the very strong military team that we have here in Iraq for their capable leadership in assisting the Iraqi government and the Iraqi security forces in achieving the third successful election in less than one year.

This month's election is I think the latest mark of progress in Iraq as they build a free and democratic nation, a nation that can protect the rights of all Iraqis and defeat the terrorists.

If you think about it, what held this country together was repression, vicious repression that fill mass graves with hundreds of thousands of bodies of men, women and children. That's how order was maintained in this country.

The Iraqi people now have written a constitution, they've ratified the constitution -- a piece of paper that is going to substitute for that repression. It is going to be that thing which will assure all of the people of this country their rights and their protection against each other and an opportunity for them and their families.

The success we've had has been noted, and at the recommendation of our military commanders and in consultation with our Coalition partners and in consultation with the Iraqi government, President Bush has authorized an adjustment for U.S. combat brigades in Iraq from 17 to 15. The size and composition of the U.S. forces of course will fluctuate as commanders continue to shift their focus to emphasize training and supporting the Iraqi security forces. This will include some increases in U.S. forces involved in transition teams, intelligence support and logistics to assist the security forces as they continue to assume greater responsibility for the security of their country.

Effecting these adjustments will reduce U.S. forces in Iraq by the spring of 2006. It will lower the high, the current high of roughly 160,000 during the election period when it was bulked up, also below the 138,000 baseline that had existed prior to the most recent election.

However, as the President has stated, force level decisions are condition based and will continue to be condition based. They'll have been and will continue to be determined by assessment of Iraq's progress, by U.S. military commanders on the ground, and will include such factors as the ground capability and effectiveness of the Iraqi security forces, its leadership and its organization, the continuing handover by Coalition forces of security responsibility to the Iraqis, and the continued political and economic progress in the country.

The President has spoken about progress on the political, economic and the security fronts. On the basis of that progress General John Abizaid, the CENTCOM Commander, and General George Casey, the Iraq Commander, have recommended the force level adjustments that we're initiating today. They will continue to monitor the situation closely and continue to consult with the Iraqi government and with our Coalition partners in the coming months, and they'll make recommendations as appropriate. Assessments, as I say, will be made periodically depending on circumstances on the ground.

Our force levels will continue to fluctuate somewhat during force rotations such as the rotation which we're now beginning.

The adjustments being announced are the recognition of the Iraqi people's progress in assuming greater responsibility for their country. It's also a recognition of your success in helping the Iraqi people build a better future.

Let me be very clear. The challenges ahead -- military, political and economic -- will not be easy.

As the President has said, our forces will be available to help the Iraqi people establish their new democracy. The United States, as you all know better than any, did not come to Iraq for oil, we did not come to occupy this country, we came here only to help.

So as we go forward the Coalition will continue to transfer responsibility for security operations to the Iraqi security forces and place more emphasis on supporting those forces through training, support activities and counter-terrorist operations.

U.S. and Coalition military leadership is trying to keep a proper balance between having a military footprint so large -- large enough to help the Iraqi people win their fight against the terrorists, but not a footprint so large and so intrusive as to antagonize a proud and patriotic people or to discourage the Iraqi people from taking initiative to run their own country themselves.

Coalition leadership is continuously assessing that balance in consultation with the Iraqi government. We anticipate future Coalition force level discussions at some point in 2006, after the new Iraqi government is in place and is prepared to discuss their future, and we will be consulting with our Coalition partners as well.

Violence in Iraq, unfortunately, as you well know, will likely continue to ebb and flow as terrorists and others continue to try to block Iraq's path to democracy -- a path now clearly chosen by the overwhelming majority of the Iraqi people. Ultimately it will be the continued wise choices by the Iraqi people that will end the violence in Iraq over time.

After watching millions of Iraqis line up to vote last week, many of them dancing in the street holding up purple stained fingers with understandable pride. It's clear that the vast majority of this country is invested in the new democratic future for Iraq. It is also increasingly clear that our strategy for victory here is winning. It's working.

These achievements would not be possible were it not for you and the support of your families back home.

The holiday season, of course, is a time when Americans reflect on families and friends, and on what's most important in our lives. We might also reflect on what a very special, decent and generous people Americans are.

It's the time of year to protect our way of life and to keep America that special place. The place where millions of people look to in times of danger and tragedy. The country to which millions more at great risk to themselves have crossed oceans and deserts to seek refuge.

It is my honor, and indeed the honor of my life to work with those of you who defend that American dream during this time of peril for our country. I've seen countless Soldiers and Sailors and Airmen and Marines undertake grave duties, with courage, with determination, and in the same moment render acts of kindness and compassion to others. I've marveled at the grit of the grievously wounded who have lost limbs but are determined to get back in the fight. Needless to say, we've all shared the grief of those whose loved ones have returned for a final tribute to their grateful country.

The strength of our military, your strength and that of your families is truly amazing. It's extraordinary, and it never fails to give me strength and encouragement and indeed inspiration for the tasks ahead.

So I thank you for that. I thank you for being who you are, and I thank you for doing what you do for all of us.

Now I'm told there are some microphones in here. I see a couple. I would be delighted to visit with you and to respond to some questions and hear what you have to say. And I would suggest that if you want to do it you move around those microphones and raise your hand and have a go at it.

How are you, sir?

QUESTION: Very well, Mr. Secretary. I'm Master Chief Terry Haynes and I'm with the 30th Naval Construction Regiment Forward.

I want to ask a question about reserve retirement. There's been a lot of talk about reducing the retirement age below the age of 60 based on deployment time and years of service. My question is do you have any news with regard to whether that is going to happen, and if so when?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: I don't. It is a discussion that takes place, as you well understand. The task that the Congress and the Executive Branch have is to try to find the right balance in total compensation for the forces. Needless to say, we have a wonderful volunteer force. Not one of you was drafted or coerced or forced to come into the service. Each one of you volunteered. You raised your hand and said send me. And God bless you for it.

What we have to do is to see that we have the right incentives to attract and retain not just the troops and the Marines, but the families as well, and that it is an attractive set of incentives, and balance them among the active force, the Guard and Reserve, the retired community, and balance them among the different types of compensation. In some cases basic compensation. In other instances it involves health care, retirement pay, housing, and various other types of incentives.

It is a complicated thing to do it, and to the extent we reach into the middle of it and change one thing it can create disequilibrium or some inequities elsewhere. So the Congress -- We've got an outside commission that's looking at that total picture and trying to make sure that it's arranged in the best way. As I'm sure you've noticed the last five years there have been pay increases that have been steady, there's been targeted pay for elements of the military that seem to be behind the civilian competitive market, and there have been improvements also with respect to health care and retirement. How that mix will all come out I don't know.

I will say this about age. One of the things we've tried to do is to increase the age where people can enter the military because of the need in the modern military for a lot of skill sets that in many cases take some time for people to develop. And also to increase the age that people can stay in the military if they wish to because of the enormous capabilities that exist and experience that exists in people who have been in for a period.

So we're trying to adjust it to fit the 21st Century and that certainly is something that's being considered.

QUESTION: Good morning, Mr. Secretary.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Greetings.

QUESTION: My name's Seaman Tyson with the Navy SEABEES.

My unit is currently deployed out of Gulfport, Mississippi, and as you know, sir, we were devastated by Hurricane Katrina. We have moved our families, we've lost homes and lost rental properties. Is there a referral program or system in place to help us find housing units when we get home?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: There is. I will see that General Johnson is given that information.

There were immediately phone banks set up and linkages established for people and the process has been partly military and partly outside of the military in the Executive Branch of the federal government and we'll be happy to gather that information for you and see that it's provided to you.

I must say, your friends back in the United States, your colleagues, did an amazing job on Hurricane Katrina and Rita. We went from something like zero to 70,000 troops -- 20,00 active and 50,000 Guard and Reserve from all across the country in a relatively short period of days. There were literally dozens of helicopters providing assistance, and the devastation in Mississippi, it just flattened for a good distance in from the coast. Of course the devastation in Louisiana was quite different, it was from the flooding of the levees, not the hurricane itself at all, but what took place after that. The need was great.

While we're on the subject I should just say one other thing. We think of you all as warriors and warfighters and that's what you are and that's why you're here, and God bless you for it. But what they did in Katrina and what they did in the United States military in the tsunami in South Asia, and I just came from Pakistan and what they have done there and are doing there is just amazing.

In Pakistan there were something like 73,000 people killed in the earthquake; over 70,000 wounded; some number of millions of human beings homeless with winter setting in at considerable altitudes. I'm told that the favorite toy in Pakistan today is a miniature Chinook helicopter.

We've deployed helicopters from all around the world into Pakistan. They set up promptly and began rescuing people and carrying cargo, and of course most countries don't have heavy lift helicopters, and they were able to put heavy equipment in beyond where the passes and roads were closed off so that they could work from that end as well as from the lower end and begin clearing roads and supply people so the wounded could be taken out, the injured could be taken out, and all kinds of supplies and trucks and things.

There are cities that don't exist, that roofs-- when you fly over them, the roofs are just on the ground. The entire foundations are gone and all you see is a tent city. Entire cities are just nothing but tent cities today.

So you folks in the United States military not only do a great job as warfighters but you've done some amazing things from a humanitarian standpoint as well. So we'll get you that information.

QUESTION: Sir, I'm also concerned about the supply and demand in Gulfport due to the increase in property values during the time we were here in Iraq. Is there any kind of, are they going to increase our BAs or anything like that?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: There is a federal program for everybody and [whatever] amount there is anything going to take place with respect to people and specific geographic locations that were damaged by the hurricanes, I don't know but I can certainly find that out as well.

It may very well be that everyone will be blanketed in under the federal programs that Congress has passed and is passing. There may not be a need for a specific military related program, but we'll find that out and see that that's made available to you as well.

Where was your home?

QUESTION: Gulfport, Mississippi sir.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Wow. Was it just wiped out?

QUESTION: Yes, sir. We no longer have property there.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: How's your family?

QUESTION: Pretty good, sir. We're moved out.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Very good.

Question.

QUESTION: Good morning, sir. My name is SKC Esker. I'm attached to NMCD 133 out of Gulfport, Mississippi as well.

As you already know, the area was devastated by Hurricane Katrina and a lot of the families in my unit are scattered all over the United States. They've gone through Safe Haven. It lasts a total of like 180 days. That means it would end in like early February. Our unit doesn't return until like late April. Can you kind of like provide us with an update on the Safe Haven program as of right now. Will it be extended or not?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: I'm sorry, it was 180 days?

QUESTION: Yes, sir.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Which is the federal program, the Safe Haven.

QUESTION: Yes.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: I've not heard any discussion about whether or not it will be extended, but I know what the government -- this is all outside of the Department of Defense, needless to say. And what they've been doing is working to see that the people who are qualified under the Safe Haven program would be dealt with and taken care of in a variety of different ways prior to the expiration. If they get closer to the expiration, I'm sure they'll address that question if there still is a universe of people who have not had those problems solved. But that would be something that Congress would address in the new session, probably in January I would think.

How about your house? Did you lose a house too?

QUESTION: No, sir. My garage collapsed on top of my Avalanche.

[Laughter].

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: On top of our head?

QUESTION: On top of my Avalanche.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Oh, my goodness. Goodness gracious, that's a shame.

[Laughter].

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Thank you, sir.

QUESTION: Good morning, Mr. Secretary. I'm Lance Corporal Farren with the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Force.

My question is reference to permanent duty stations here in Iraq. As soon as our mission is completed is there going to be permanent bases out here that Marines are going have obligated service to?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: That's an interesting question that comes up from time to time. The answer is we have no idea, but at the moment there are no plans for permanent bases here in this country. The reason I say that is, it is a subject that has not even been discussed with the Iraqi government. We have here a sovereign nation, and up until this most recent election and the process they are now going through to establish their new government, there hasn't been any government to talk to about their interests with respect to bases.

So what we've been doing in working with first the Iraqi Governing Council, then the Interim Government and the Transitional Government, and passing over responsibility as you may know, we've I think transferred responsibility already for something like 17 bases to the Iraqis. But it will be some time -- weeks for sure, possibly a couple of months, hopefully not much longer than that for the Iraqis to decide who their key leadership will be as a result of the elections. The election results have to be certified and then they have to have some time to decide who will be the senior officials and get approved by the new assembly. Then they have to select Ministers and they have to get themselves in position to begin governing. And at some point thereafter, later this year one would think, that our status with them would be discussed and to the extent they have an interest in our assisting them for some period over time, then they would raise that with us.

If you think of what happened in Afghanistan -- You know, we have no desire to have our forces anywhere they're not wanted. Indeed, quite the contrary. We want our forces located in places that are hospitable to them. We've been adjusting our force posture around the world to achieve that. It's been a good thing. We're not much better situated for the 21st Century with our global force posture adjustments.

In Afghanistan, President Karzai held what they call a Loya Jurga, a large meeting or conference, to talk to the Afghan people about his desire to have the United States and Afghanistan enter into a strategic partnership and agree that we would provide counter-terrorism activity in this country, and in addition some training and equipping of the Afghan military, and a presence for some period -- not a big, permanent base to be sure. Nothing like we've had in Germany or Okinawa, or various other places, but a forward operating site, a forward location. Because for some period of time we felt, and the Afghan people felt, that they would not have a military capable of serving as an appropriate deterrent in their country. So we've agreed to have an operating site in their country for some period -- at their request.

I have no idea what will take place with respect to Iraq, but clearly our role is to see that there be a single country in Iraq, not broken into pieces, that it be at peace with its neighbors, that it have a constitution -- which it now does -- that will protect the Iraqi people from each other and provide the kinds of rights and opportunities for those people. And we've agreed to help develop the Iraqi security forces so that they can provide for their security. Because in the last analysis -- the Iraqis have to run Iraq. It's their country, they're going to have a distinctly Iraqi government. They're going to have Iraqi armed forces, and it's their task to govern here. Our task is to help create an environment that's a possibility where they can do that. Where they can get from where they were, a vicious, repressive regime, to a country at peace in this region and a partner in the global war on terror.

How it will evolve I think is entirely up to the Iraqi people over time.

I don't envision the United States establishing a lot of the old kind of bases where we were thinking in terms of our location with the Soviet Union, and as a result had forces in place prepared to defend real estate where they were located. Our forces for the 21st Century have to be agile, deployable, and expeditionary and not defending real estate in place the way we would during the 20th Century. So that suggests to me that we're not likely to establish anywhere large bases from a defensive standpoint, but rather operating sites and operating locations and arrangements with other governments that will enable us to use those sites in a way that's effective and of interest from their standpoint, and also effective, giving us the kind of mobility and deployability and agility that we're going to need to deal with the kinds of threats and challenges that we see in the 21st Century.

Thank you very much.

QUESTION: Thank you, sir.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Question. Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, good morning. I'm First Lieutenant Rod McGrath with 7th Engineer Support Battalion out of Camp Pendleton.

I actually have a statement and a bit of question, sir. This is my third tour over here. I actually just wanted to say, sir, that I'm not a Republican, I'm not a Democrat, I'm a United States Marine. This is my third tour here. As someone who's had their boots on the deck here two times before, sir, I can actually say I have seen improvements, I have seen changes.

The one question I have sir, is how can I, how can my Marines better tell our story to the American people? It seems to me, I see news stories occasionally that don't necessarily highlight the fact that my Marines are doing good things every day, and there really has been an improvement. If I can see it I wonder why the majority of the American people sometimes can't see the differences that are being made here, sir.

In addition to that, sir, as our mission in Iraq continues for the greater war on terror, where is our next step sir? Because I don't have the arrogance to speak for the United States Marine Corps, but I know the Marine Corps is ready to execute.

[Hooahs]

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Thank you very much.

I guess I don't know the answer to the first part of your question. It is stunning, absolutely stunning to tell to people here who see progress, who see what's happening, who see the clinics are open and schools are open and the stock market's functioning, the currency's been stable, and people -- there are not masses of displaced people, and the Iraqi people have been successful in moving the political process, set a political benchmark that exists, and yet the focus frequently is on anything but those marks of progress as you point out. You're here and in danger and in conflict, but there is also a test of wills taking place, as I mentioned. And in a very real sense, one of the centers of gravity of this war on terror is back in the United States and particularly in Washington, D.C. The people we're up against know how to manage the media. They have media committees, the terrorists do. And they systematically put out information that they believe will weaken the will of the American people and of Western nations. It serves their purpose and they're very good at it. They're very clever, they're very successful. And they lie. The old saying, I think it was Mark Twain who said that a lie speeds around in seconds, while truth is still putting its boots on. It takes a long time to prove a negative.

So if someone says something that's a lie and it speeds around the world, to correct it, you can't prove a negative unless you get on the ground, find out what actually took place, and we have an obligation to tell the truth and to be responsible and to be credible. And so our folks have to go find out precisely what happened.

You'll recall a story that was printed, it was totally false, that some Koran has been flushed down the toilet. It was printed and it raced around the world, and there were riots in some Muslim countries, and people were killed, and it wasn't true. It never happened.

So we believe in democracy, we believe that the American people given sufficient information will find their way to right decisions, and one of the things you can do is what you do do. A really great thing, if you think about it. For the first time we're fighting a war in the 21st Century where there's e-mail, and there's talk radio, and there's 24 hour news, and there are digital cameras, and you folks are communicating with your families -- 160,000 in this country right now, Americans. And every day you're communicating back what you see, what you know, what you think. And it is different from what people back there are seeing with their eyes and ears, hearing with their ears, about what other people's views of what's happening. They see that difference. That ripples through our society and I think causes a reduced credibility for information that's put out that's inaccurate over time.

But I have a lot of confidence in the American people. They've got a good center of gravity. What you need to do is what you're doing, and that's to keep telling the truth. Keep seeing that the people you know, can all see the slice that you see of what's taking place, and they're going to be able to take that and synthesize it, and internalize it, and come to the right decisions.

It is a test of wills, but you know, it's always been a test of wills in our country if you think about it. We were divided during the Revolutionary War with Loyalists and Revolutionaries; it was a bitter struggle. The Civil War was a bitter struggle with divisions in the country. In World War II, I was alive and watched the vitriolic treatment of President Franklin Roosevelt during that period.

The battle takes place everywhere, and in this modern world we live in it takes place everywhere all at once.

The debate back there is understandable. Wars are never popular, they're ugly things and they're hard things. On the other hand, if the people in our country had not persevered in the Revolutionary War, we wouldn't have this country. And if they hadn't persevered in World War I and World War II, we wouldn't have this country. They persevered notwithstanding all the debate and all the discussion and all the inaccuracies and all the misperceptions, and out of all of that came a solid center of our country. So all I can say is keep sending back e-mails, keep talking to your friends and families and telling them the truth and we'll all be fine.

What was the second part of your question?

QUESTION: Where to next, sir?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: You know, if you think about it, we talk about Iraq as we should. It's important. We talk about Afghanistan. But what we're in is a global war on terror. It is a struggle in the Muslim religion between a small number of violent extremists who are determined to behead people and kill people and force the world to see things the way they see things, to try to reestablish a caliphate in the world, to overthrow moderate Muslim nations, to attack Western values and Western behavior and Western culture. They're a small minority. The overwhelming numbers of people in that religion are moderate and they aren't extremist and they aren't terrorists.

The terrorists understand what the word terror means. The word terror means to terrorize. It isn't to kill, it's to

terrorize. It's to affect someone's mind and behavior, to alter their behavior. To make them do what you want them to do. That strikes at the very heart of what we are as free people.

As free people, our very essence is to not be terrorized. To be able to do what we want, go where we wish, say what we wish, live lives that we wish to live, know we can send our children out to school and they'll come home safely, and to not be frightened, and to not alter the way we live. The terrorists strike at the very heart of that.

So what we're dealing with, what you're dealing with, what our society, in fact much of the world, the overwhelming majority of the world is dealing with, is a group of people who can take all of the technological advancements that they wouldn't be capable of producing, free societies produce them, and to use them against us, against our people, against innocent men, women and children because they are, they don't discriminate between who they kill. That is what we're up against.

So you say what next. I would say it is a long war. It is not a short war. There will be a struggle that we're going to be engaged in for some time. And it is unconventional, it's irregular, it is not going to be large armies and navies massed against each other as in the last century. It is going to require a new set of skills and talents and a way of thinking. They don't have big bureaucracies that they have to manage, they don't have real estate that they have to defend. They're able to turn inside our circle frequently. They constantly watch what we do and adapt to it and adjust, just as we have to become agile and constantly adapt and adjust to the challenges, the nature of the challenges as they change.

So when you say what's next, I think that's what's next and what's going to be the task of your generation. I wouldn't want to predict for how long, but for a god chunk of time. Thank you very much.

QUESTION: Thank you, sir.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, [inaudible].

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: You're giving me the hook?

[Laughter].

QUESTION: [inaudible].

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: I'll decide when the last question is.

[Hooahs and applause].

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: And I want to go out on a good one, so let's see how this one is. There are some more people lined up. I'll pick and choose.

Yes, sir. Merry Christmas to you.

QUESTION: Thank you, sir. Staff Sergeant Everitt, HMT Motor T.

I just had a question about a few select Marines were interested in extending their tours beyond the 365 cap.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Marines who want to extend their tour in Iraq --

QUESTION: Yes, sir.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: -- beyond the period --

QUESTION: Yes, sir. Some were told that that was just out of the question. They said that came from you, sir.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Came from me?

[Laughter].

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: I get blamed for more dad-burn things that I don't have anything to do with --

[Laughter].

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: You can be certain I never said anything like that. I have had I'm going to guess three or four meetings with the Commandant of the Marine Corps and the Secretary of the Navy and the Chief of Staff of the Army and the Secretary of the Army trying to figure out why it makes sense for the Navy to have a six month deployment and 12 months back; the Air Force to work on three or four or six month expeditionary deployments; and the ground forces, in the case of the Army, to have generally one year deployments; and Marines to have one year for the higher level headquarters, but seven months for most of the Marines. I've listened to their explanations three or four times and I still don't understand.

[Laughter].

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: When I listen to something three or four times and I still don't understand it makes me wonder if the people explaining it understand.

[Laughter].

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Each of the services of course manage that themselves. It never crossed my mind to suggest that people couldn't extend beyond a seven month period or whatever. I don't know what the dynamics might be or why somebody might have led you to believe that that's not possible. I suppose unit cohesion is one thing that affects it.

But we need people to do what they want to do, because when people are doing what they want to do they do it well. If I were you I'd just keep knocking on the door. Who knows, you might even be able to make it. I like his spirit, though. Good for you.

Question?

Oh. Here's the General, huh?

[Laughter].

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: So that's how this works out here.

You are amazing folks and I am so grateful to you.

The holiday season is a period when of course you'll be connecting with your families and friends; you'll have a chance to do what we talked about here and tell them what you think and what you're accomplishing and how you feel about the world and what your hopes and expectations are here. As long as you keep doing that and you keep telling the truth and you keep doing the truly spectacular job you're doing, our country is going to be in great shape.

So Merry Christmas and Happy Hanukkah and God bless you.

[Hooahs and applause].