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**Presenter: Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld and Vice Chairman, November 15, 2005 1:20 PM EST
Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Edmund P. Giambastiani Jr.**

News Briefing with Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld and Adm. Edmund P. Giambastiani Jr.

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SEC. RUMSFELD: Good afternoon, folks. A few days ago, President Bush noted that some critics seem to want to rewrite the history of the coalition's involvement in Iraq. It might be useful to take a moment to retrace the actual history.

In 1998, the U.S. Congress passed and President Clinton signed the Iraqi Liberation Act. That law specified 10 findings of Saddam Hussein's violations of international norms and stated, quote, "It should be the policy of the United States to support efforts to remove the regime headed by Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq and to promote the emergence of a democratic government to replace that regime," unquote. That legislation passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 360 to 38, and it passed the Senate without a single vote in opposition.

In December of that year, 1998, President Clinton ordered military action in response to Iraq's decision to expel the U.N. weapon inspectors. In an address to the nation, he stated, quote, "Other countries possess weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles. With Saddam, there's one big difference: he has used them. The international community had little doubt then and I have no doubt today, that left unchecked, Saddam Hussein will use these terrible weapons again," unquote.

Justifying President Clinton's decision, then-vice president, Gore, asked, if you allow -- quote, "If you allow someone like Saddam Hussein to get nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, chemical weapons, biological weapons, how many people is he going to kill with such weapons?" unquote.

The then-secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, said, "Iraq is a long way from Ohio, but what happens there matters a great deal here. For the risk that the leaders of a rogue state will use nuclear, chemical or biological weapons against us or our allies is the greatest security threat we face," unquote.

And the then-national security adviser, Sandy Berger, said, "He will rebuild his arsenal of weapons of mass destruction, and some day, some way, I am certain he will use that arsenal again, as he has 10 times since 1983," unquote.

Four years later, in October 2002, by a large margin, a bipartisan majority of the Congress authorized

President Bush to use force, if necessary, to deal with the continued threat posed by Saddam Hussein. In the legislation, the U.S. Congress stated that Iraq, quote, "Poses a continuing threat to the national security of the United States by continuing to possess and develop a significant chemical and biological weapons capability, actively seeking a nuclear weapons capability, and supporting and harboring terrorist organizations," unquote. These assessments were echoed by foreign intelligence agencies from countries that included Great Britain, France, Germany, and Russia, and by the United Nations Security Council in more than a dozen different Security Council resolutions between 1990 and the year 2002.

In early 2004, weapons inspector David Kaye, while acknowledging he had not found weapons of mass destruction, testified that Iraq, quote, "Maintained programs and activities, and they certainly had the intentions at a point to resume their programs," unquote. Later that year, weapons inspector Charles Duelfer noted, quote, "Saddam Hussein wanted to end sanctions while preserving the capability to reconstitute his weapons of mass destruction when sanctions were lifted," unquote.

This is the history that brought us to where we are today. These are simply facts. The times we live in are serious. We're in the midst of a global war that threatens free people across the world, as evidenced by attacks here in Washington, D.C., in New York City, in Bali, London, Madrid, Beslan, Jerusalem, Riyadh, and most recently at a wedding reception in Amman, Jordan. Innocent people -- mothers, fathers, children -- have been murdered by a network of Islamic extremists -- Islamofacists, if you will -- seeking to impose their dark vision on free people. They seek to build in Iraq what they once had in Afghanistan -- a safe haven -- and then to expand throughout the region and beyond. Their terms are not negotiable.

While the American people understandably want to know when our forces can leave Iraq, I believe they do not want them to leave until our mission is accomplished and the Iraqis are able to sustain their fledgling democracy. As the president has said, one cannot set arbitrary deadlines. Timing of the handover of responsibility to Iraqis depends on conditions on the ground. And already some responsibilities are being assumed by the Iraqi security forces. We must be careful not to give terrorists the false hope that if they can simply hold on long enough, that they can outlast us.

Admiral Giambastiani.

ADM. GIAMBASTIANI: Good afternoon.

This past week in Jordan, the world witnessed yet another cruel and unconscionable act of terrorism. Scores of innocent men, women and children were killed or injured in three separate suicide bomb attacks in Amman. It appears from all we know at this time that Zarqawi ordered these attacks on his Muslim countrymen. His actions make it clear that he is serious about spreading al Qaeda's extremist ideology outside of Iraq.

However, the antidote to such extremism can be seen in the recent elections in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Iraqi and Afghan people have taken the first steps to form governments to provide for free marketplace, education, ethnic and religious equality, security of cities, countrysides and borders, and a chance to make a better life for the next generation.

The political progress in the region frightens the terrorists. Every vote for democracy is a vote against their kind of hatred. The missions of the coalition haven't changed. Our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines and Coast Guardsmen understand their efforts are making a difference. They get it. They understand we are at war, they understand the mission, they understand the stakes, and they are performing exceedingly well.

Let me close by extending on behalf of the Joint Chiefs of Staff our condolences to the people of Jordan, who have suffered a great loss at the hands of terrorists. You have been a close and strong ally in the war on terror. We share in your grief and stand by your side.

On that note, the secretary and I would be happy to take your questions.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Charlie?

Q Mr. Secretary, you've listed a list of facts here, and I don't think anyone would argue with most of them, including the fact that former President Clinton, Madeleine Albright, Al Gore and others warned that Iraq was a threat to possibly use weapons of mass destruction, in fact had done it. You don't mention that the Bush administration or President Bush ordered an invasion of Iraq claiming that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, which it didn't. So how is this straightening out history?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, Charlie, it seems to me that what we're seeing is, we've got men and women serving in Iraq, risking their lives, and -- on the one hand, and on the other hand, we have people suggesting that the reason we're there was because this president decided to go in based on information that was unique to him. And it wasn't unique to him. The information that he based his decision on was the same information that President Clinton and the previous administration had. It's the same information members of the House and Senate had. It's the same information that the other intelligence services have. And it seems to me that people who are willing to risk their lives need to know the truth. They need to understand that they are there based on decisions that were made in good faith by responsible people, and that this world is going to be a lot better off with Saddam Hussein gone and with that country on a path towards democracy.

Ivan?

Q Mr. Secretary -- and Admiral Giambastiani, you can jump in if you like -- but the Defense Science Board recently suggested that the Pentagon buy more C-17s, without saying how many. And the Senate has passed a non-binding resolution calling for up to 42 more. And ultimately you make the call. Can you give us a sneak preview as to what your call will be and also maybe a sneak preview on the QDR? Is the DD(X) and the JSF in trouble?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Ed?

ADM. GIAMBASTIANI: With regard to the C-17s, we have looked -- we are looking at everything. So you've mentioned a couple of systems. We're looking at about every weapons platform there is. We're looking at organizations. We're trying to make it as comprehensive as possible for the QDR.

With regard to the C-17s, we've had a mobility requirement study that has been recently completed. It's classified. But essentially what we have in our program is a very substantial airlift capability of C-17s, C-5As, C-5Bs, obviously C-130s, a variety of them, and the rest.

And if we maintain those fleets and the programs that we currently have funded throughout our future year defense plan and the rest, we have a very capable and adequate airlift fleet.

With regard to the destroyer, with regard to some of these other systems, all of these, including the C-17s, are still in play right now.

Q If I read you correctly, sir, you're saying that you don't need any more C-17s, as you now see it. Is that correct?

ADM. GIAMBASTIANI: There are a lot of ways to skin a cat. What I'm telling you is, our mobility requirement study says we have sufficient airlift if we stay on a funded program that we currently have.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yes?

Q Mr. Secretary, I want to get your reaction to the 79-9 vote that just took place in the Senate on the authorization committee.

SEC. RUMSFELD: I wasn't aware of it.

Q Well, your legislative guy should have told you. (Laughter.) It was basically that the Senate --

SEC. RUMSFELD: No, they're busy. They can't follow every thing every second, now. Don't pick on them. I -- say I should have known. (Laughter.)

Q The bottom line, though, it's a sense of the Senate on the war requiring the Pentagon and the administration to file more complete, regular progress reports. And it pressed the Pentagon --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Is this the one that was pending by Warner and somebody --

Q Yeah, and Frist.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Frist.

Q And here's my question. Looking back as a former member of Congress, does this signal to you a growing impatience in the U.S. Senate similar to the early '70s debates on Vietnam?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Oh, I wouldn't go down that road myself. It's understandable that the American people and the Congress are interested in knowing as much as possible about a war. A war is an important thing. It's a serious thing. It's a dangerous thing. People die, and we know that, and it's heartbreaking.

I was reading a book last night, Winston Churchill, and he said the problem is not winning the war but persuading people to let them -- let him win the war, he said. In a free system like we have -- these situations don't evolve in a dictatorship. It's only in free systems that we have these kind of open, public debates and discussions.

Just a piece of factual information. I'm told that the Department of Defense and the Department of State send literally dozens of Iraqi-related reports to Congress each year already. Seven are required reports. We have seven voluntary briefings. We have 28 IG reports, 52 GAO reports, and regular classified updates on the Iraqi security forces, which I believe go up there every month. Many of those things address what, as I recall, an earlier draft of that amendment may have covered. And that's fine. I mean, that's all part of the interaction between the executive and legislative branch. And they have every right to ask for reports, and we send, I don't know, it's something over 900 reports total every year from the Department of Defense to the Congress. I hope someone reads them.

But no, what it reflects to me is that this is a serious business and these are serious people and they're interested in having as much information as possible.

I was struck by what someone told me about another amendment, where Senator Lieberman spoke and pointed out that he was concerned -- I think he said, quote, that it seems to be -- you don't want to -- he said one of these amendments would send "a message that I fear will discourage our troops because it seems to be heading to the door. It will encourage the terrorists and it will confuse the Iraqi people and affect their judgments as they go forward."

And I mention that because another one that's pending involves deadlines, as I recall, or timetables of some sort.

Q That was shot down.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Was it?

Q Yes.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Good.

Q But the point, I mean the impatience there, is this impatience coming a lot quicker than you would have anticipated? I mean, this your own party pressing this at the moment; it was 79 to 9. It was many Republicans, including Warner and Frist.

SEC. RUMSFELD: I think that amendment, I was told, was going to be offered in lieu of one that was somewhat different.

Q Yeah, but the point -- I mean, impatience, though. That's what I'm trying to get your sense on.

SEC. RUMSFELD: I think -- I have a lot of confidence in the American people, and frankly, I have a lot of confidence in the Congress. The Congress represents the American people, and the American people have a very good center of gravity. They listen, and they'll decide.

And what's going on in Iraq is important. It's important historically. It's important for the Iraqi people. It's important for the entire region, and quite honestly, it's very important for the United States of America and the coalition countries that have a desire to have their people be able to live as free people and not be subjected to the dictates of a hand -- small handful of fanatics.

Yes?

Q Mr. Secretary, the Japanese government has now agreed to the assignment of a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier to Japan. Does that now, in your mind, clear the way for the retirement of the John F. Kennedy that was discussed earlier this year? And also, is it to be the occasion for a realignment of naval forces, to put more naval forces in the Pacific?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Do you want to respond to that?

ADM. GIAMBASTIANI: Right now, you're going to see a plan, a carrier plan. You'll see a naval force plan that will come out of the Quadrennial Defense Review. I hate to give you the -- I'll defer the answer. But right now, we haven't come down--the department does stand by the recommendation that came forward out of a program budget decision last December on the John F. Kennedy. That's where we stand right now, and that's where we're proceeding. And our plans that will come out of the QDR will in fact talk about this potential realignment, and that's what we're discussing and debating right now within the QDR. So there are no final decisions yet.

Q Mr. Secretary, could I ask you, in retrospect, do you feel that you were let down by the intelligence community on the intelligence on Iraq, or were people making honest mistakes based on the best information available, or how do you look at it?

SEC. RUMSFELD: There's no doubt in my mind that people made honest mistakes in that set of -- the pieces of that intelligence that were presented at the United Nations. They certainly were not intentional, and they were clearly honest mistakes.

And -- now, do you feel let down because something is inaccurate and imperfect? You'd be let down

every day by intelligence, because by its nature, it's hard to do, it's tough. And we constantly need better intelligence. If there's one thing I hear every single day from the battlefield commanders, it's they need better intelligence. And it is a tough thing to do. They have tough jobs, and they're doing their best.

And is it better or worse than in previous eras? My guess is it's better than in previous eras. Why do I say that? Well, we're spending a great deal of money. We've got a lot of awful fine people. We've probably got more people right now than we have in the last 10, 15 years, working this problem. But is it perfect? No. Will it ever be perfect? I doubt it.

Q So -- can I just follow? So do you think that the weapons --

SEC. RUMSFELD: You're cutting into other people's time. But that's all right with me! (Laughs.)

Q That's good. I want the time.

Do you think that the WMD just wasn't there? Or what's happened?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Time will tell. We'll learn.

Q Mr. Secretary?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yes.

Q The Operation Steel Curtain, as it advances, the Marines say they're going to leave troops behind in these towns that they've cleared of insurgents. How many American forces are going to be left behind? And if there are significant numbers left behind, what does it do to troop levels that have to fight elsewhere?

SEC. RUMSFELD: First of all, I don't know the number that will be left behind, nor do I need to know. Second, I wouldn't tell you if I did know. Why would we want to announce to the terrorists that there's only X or Y or Z? Third, it's going to be a mix of U.S., coalition, and Iraqi security forces. And how long will they stay there? They'll stay there as long as the battlefield commander decides it's a good idea to stay there.

Q Can I follow up on that?

ADM. GIAMBASTIANI: If I could -- if I could add -- Mr. Secretary --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yes.

ADM. GIAMBASTIANI: -- just to add to that. What's different than many previous operations is that we're leaving many more well-trained Iraqis in these areas.

Q When John McCain has called for a "clear and hold" strategy in Iraq, in a briefing last week at the AEI, and he's saying 10,000 more soldiers are needed over there for this kind of strategy. Could you both comment on that?

SEC. RUMSFELD: (To the General.) Want to comment?

ADM. GIAMBASTIANI: Sir.

SEC. RUMSFELD: The -- we've been over this so many times. It's perfectly understandable that people differ as to what the number ought to be. The number at the present time is between 155,000 and 160,000. The base level had been about 138,000 for some preceding months. So it is 10,000 more, plus -- more than 10,000

more than it had been in an earlier period. The reason they're there, obviously, was for the referendum, the referendum on the constitution, and for the upcoming elections --

Q What about --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Just a minute. Just a minute.

Q Okay.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Just let me answer your question.

I'll say it one last time. The numbers that are there are the numbers that General John Abizaid, the commander of CENTCOM; General George Casey, the commander in Iraq, and his division commanders throughout the country have decided they want to recommend to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs and me and to the president.

Q Is that --

SEC. RUMSFELD: And that is why the number is -- that's there is there.

Q Is that --

SEC. RUMSFELD: And I promise you it very likely will be the number that's there --

Q (Inaudible) --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Shhh!

(Laughter.)

Q Okay.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Just stop.

I promise you that it very likely will be the number that you will find there tomorrow, the next day and the day after. It will be the number they recommend.

Q What about --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Imagine that.

Q What about --

SEC. RUMSFELD: That is something I've said repeatedly from this podium, and it seems not to sink in. Why?

Q Part of my question -- the other part is "clear and hold." That's the strategy, he thinks, that should be adopted now.

ADM. GIAMBASTIANI: If I could, Mr. Secretary, to help out here -- I didn't understand the way you asked it initially, which is why I didn't answer. But what's important here is that the hold part is increasingly relying on Iraqi security forces. And will there be more forces behind? The answer is yes. And the Iraqi numbers keep

growing every single day. We're at 212,000 today. And those numbers will continue to grow. And the hold strategy is that more and more of Iraq is being held by Iraqi security forces. It's substantial.

Q The bottom line is, you're already adopting that current hold strategy. Is that right?

ADM. GIAMBASTIANI: Yes.

Q Mr. Secretary, in regard to the various pieces of legislation up on the Hill regarding detainees and war strategy, we've heard from many of the Republicans and Democrats alike that Congress feels that it should take a more active and direct role in the war in Iraq. Do you -- would you consider that intervention by Congress helpful, one, or two, do you think that signals a vote of no confidence in the way you and the Pentagon have been conducting the war?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, the Congress is Article I of the Constitution. They have all legislative authority, and they control the purse strings, and they can do that which they wish to do. And they do. So I wouldn't characterize it as an intervention at all.

Second, it seems to me that what you're seeing is -- we just saw a bipartisan vote that I quoted Senator Lieberman as participating in, that rejected the kind of an, quote, "intervention" that you're suggesting. And it seems to me that the -- there's a great deal of confidence in the troops, in General Abizaid, in General Casey, in the people who are making the decisions with respect to the effort in Iraq.

And they're making good progress. I mean, you don't go from where they were to having a -- an elected government taking control of sovereignty, fashioning a constitution, having a referendum on the constitution and in one month having a vote under that new constitution. That is enormous progress for a country like Iraq that has no experience to -- in doing that. What's taking place there is historic. And it is -- and progress is being made. Let there be no doubt.

Q Mr. Secretary --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yes?

Q Could I get your reaction to the court today -- on the David Hicks military commission?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I think he -- when he asked about the -- what?

Q The David Hicks military --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Oh, David Hicks.

Q -- (off mike).

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yes, the courts have intervened and -- as I understand it. And things are off for a period until the courts sort through things. We live in -- under a system of laws, and the -- I forget what level court did it, but it was either a district court or an appellate court.

Q (Off mike.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: District?

Q (Off mike) -- proceeding, but --

SEC. RUMSFELD: You can't proceed right now. You have to wait, and as I understand it -- is that correct?

STAFF: For that case, yes.

SEC. RUMSFELD: For that case, you have to wait and see.

Ma'am?

Q Mr. Secretary, given what you said in response to Rick's question about the erroneous intelligence, if you had known what the correct intelligence would have been, would you have made the same recommendations to go to war?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Oh, I'm not going to get in to that.

Q I mean, and this is absent everything that's happened in Iraq since --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yeah, I'm not going to get into that.

Q Mr. Secretary?

Q Mr. Secretary, follow-up?

Q Mr. Secretary, there are reports that two men who were detainees in Iraq, taken in July of 2003 -- they are now claiming that as part of their interrogation, they were thrown into a cage with lions. Can you tell us if any member of the U.S. military has ever threatened a detainee in that way -- coerced him, tortured him in any way, using lions?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I read the same report. It seems quite far-fetched. People are -- obviously, everything that everyone alleges is looked into. But you got to keep in mind that the documents that were found, I believe in Manchester, train people -- terrorists -- to lie about their treatment, and they do it consistently, and it always works.

Q So you think this never happens?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I didn't say that. You heard precisely what I said. I spoke very precisely, and you can get a transcript of it if you really want to know what I said. And I'll stick with what I said.

Q Mr. Secretary?

Q Mr. Secretary, what would be the implications -- what would be the implications if the Court invalidates the military tribunals and you have to go through regular federal court with these cases?

SEC. RUMSFELD: You know, I've said it a hundred times up here -- I'm not a lawyer. And the military commissions have been used in our history to good effect. The president made a decision to make commissions available in this conflict, the global war on terror. It's not surprising that courts intervene, and then things get sorted out. There have been, for the most part, decisions that have -- I think this is accurate -- but thinking back over the entire period, I would say that for the most part, court decisions have tended ultimately to validate the president's decision with respect to military commissions. Whether this latest one will or will not, I don't know.

But in the event -- I personally think they'll end up being permitted under our Constitution and our laws. Were they to not be, I suppose one could go -- and the people are talking about various types of legislation that

make them permissible. And if they were not ultimately permitted, then you'd have to figure out what was permitted, and the people who -- the Justice Department and the people who decide these things would go about their business.

Yes? We'll make this the last question.

Q Yeah. One of the sentiments expressed by both Republicans and Democrats in the Senate is that the Iraqi political leaders need to be sent a message that the United States is not in Iraq indefinitely, as an incentive to get them to take greater responsibility for their own security leadership. How do you respond to that? Do you -- are you satisfied with the Iraqi political leadership, or do they need to be sent a message?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, of course, the leadership is not "the leadership." It's a scoop of individuals from different sects and different religions and different political lists, and they have differing views. But -- I mean, the fact of the matter is I meet with a lot of Iraqis, and overwhelmingly, they suggest that they're anxious to have the time arrive when we do not have to have so many forces there so visibly. And that's our desire as well.

So it seems to me that we're all very much in agreement, the president of the United States, who says he wants to hand over responsibility as soon as is possible and is working very hard to achieve that. We're already handing over responsibility in a number of areas. I expect that after this election, we'll be able to hand over additional responsibilities as the Iraqi security forces continue to grow in number. And that's the desire of the -- at least a number of the Iraqi leaders, just as it's the desire of the president of the United States and the troops themselves.

We don't go into a country to stay in a country. We go into a country to try to be helpful and then leave as soon as is possible, but not in a manner that's precipitous; and not in a manner that would inject an instability into the situation; and not in a manner that would suggest to the terrorists that all they have to do is wait us out, and they'll be able to have their way. Because if they have their way and impose their medieval vision on that country in that part of the world, it would be an enormous price to pay. And I don't think that's going to happen.

Thank you, folks.

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