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Presenter: Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Peter Pace

November 20, 2005

Stakeout With Secretary Rumsfeld and General Pace After Appearance on CNN

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Q: Mr. Secretary, when will United States forces begin pulling out of Iraq?

RUMSFELD: Well, one way to think about it is that we have about 159,000 and after the election on December 15th we're going to be bringing that number down to about 138,000 from 159,000. What will take place thereafter is we're working with the Iraqi government and the embassy, the military, the Iraqi government have been developing the kinds of conditions that make it appropriate to pass off still more responsibility to the Iraqi people and the Iraqi Security Forces. Recently we've turned over some 17 bases to the Iraqi Security Forces. These are [inaudible] that the Iraqis are completely in charge. Large portions of Baghdad the Iraqis are in charge. So it will just be an incremental thing and it will take place and as the Iraqi Security Forces continue to grow and they take more responsibility we'll be able to reduce the size of the Coalition over time based on those conditions.

Q: Isn't there a civil war already going on in Iraq? And the United States presence, isn't that exacerbating that civil war?

PACE: There is in fact some factional fighting between Sunnis and Shia and Kurds, but that is not what you describe it to be. What you do have is individuals in all three of those communities who want to terrorize the Iraqi people, do not want them to be able to vote, do not want them to be able to pick their own way ahead. We should be very proud of the Coalition forces there, especially the US forces who are providing A, tremendous success on the battlefield when they're fighting; B, enormous support for the Iraqi armed forces who are getting stronger and stronger every day; and C, are able to assist in the stability of the country so the Iraqi government can do what it's doing which is growing its capacity to take care of their own people.

RUMSFELD: I would only add one thing. Clearly the General is correct, there is not a civil war as such. There is tension. There always have been. But the presence of foreign forces can be intrusive in a country and there's no question but that the insurgents try to use that to argue to increase the size of the insurgency. So one of the tensions that exists is to have enough forces to see that we can contribute to security as the Iraqi Security Forces continue to be built up, but also not to have too many forces that you contribute to the arguments that the insurgents make that there's some sort of an occupation taking place. So there is that tension that exists. General Abizaid and General Casey have to manage that very carefully as they do.

Q: Managing it. The question that's given me here is the contingent of Senator McCain that the United States needs some more troops. Is that the answer, that tension that you're trying to [create]?

PACE: First of all, Senator McCain is a great national hero. He has sacrificed for this country in ways none of us can even imagine in his time as a prisoner of war. A great American.

I see the situation a little bit differently than that quote would indicate. We in fact have the right balance of forces on the ground between ourselves, about 159,000; the Iraqis, 210,000; our Coalition partners, another 23,000. The totality of the numbers of soldiers from all the Coalition partners is significant, is growing and is adequate to the task.