



U.S. Department of Defense
Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs)

News Transcript

On the Web:

<http://www.defenselink.mil/cgi-bin/dlprint.cgi?http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2006/tr20060314-12644.html>

Media contact: +1 (703) 697-5131

Public contact:

<http://www.dod.mil/faq/comment.html>

or +1 (703) 428-0711

**Presenter: Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld and Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
Gen. Peter Pace**

**March 14,
2006**

DoD News Briefing with Secretary Rumsfeld and Gen. Pace

SEC. RUMSFELD: When you consider the day-to-day events in Iraq, it's clearly a very difficult situation. Violence continues. The democratic process can be frustratingly slow, particularly in a country that has little or no experience with representative government. And of course we have heard predictions of an imminent civil war in Iraq off and on for some time now.

I had a good visit on the phone this morning with Ambassador Zal Khalilzad, and in my view, he is doing a first-rate job for our country. And he reports that today has been a good day there in terms of the discussions he's had with the various political leaders.

To properly evaluate the situation in Iraq, it seems to me, we ought to consider the following questions. Are the Iraqi people supporting their nation's democratic transformation? Are the Iraqi forces taking on more responsibility for the security of their country? And are the coalition forces in Iraq helping to make our country safer?

First, are the vast majority of the Iraqi people supporting the coalition's effort in Iraq? And the answer clearly is yes. Consider that despite threats to their lives and to their families, the percentage of Iraqis participating in elections over the past year has increased each time, from the election for the provisional government to the constitutional referendum in October to the election of the permanent government.

Large numbers of Iraqis continue to volunteer to join their security forces, despite attacks waged against those forces. And the number of tips from Iraqis to the authorities about terrorist activities have increased to encouragingly high levels.

Second, are the Iraqi people taking on more security responsibilities in their country? And the answer is also yes. Today some 100 Iraqi battalions are in the fight against the terrorists, and 49 control their own battle space. About 75 percent of operations involve Iraqi security forces, and nearly half of those are independently Iraqi-planned, conducted and led.

Iraqi security forces control the battle space currently for about 60 percent of Baghdad, including areas such as Haifa Street, Sadr City and the airport road.

And last, is the coalition effort in Iraq contributing to U.S. security? And the answer, in my view, is also yes. A free and stable Iraq will not go to war against its neighbors, will not use chemical weapons against its own people, will not harbor or support terrorists, will not pay rewards to the families of suicide bombers and will not seek to kill Americans.

Our coalition is fighting terrorists in Iraq so we do not have to fight the terrorists here at home. Moreover, the rise of a democratic Iraq as in Afghanistan is giving millions of people the hope that they, too, might take part in free societies. And as that desire spreads, it will severely undermine the militant ideology that feeds terrorism and opposes the right of free people.

Three years into the operation in Iraq, I recognize that well-meaning people can ask, "Why is it important that we complete the mission?" Similar questions have been asked about our country's efforts in other eras. But consider what the world would be like if, whenever things seem to go wrong or to have grown more difficult than expected, the Americans and their leaders in that generation had simply thrown in the towel rather than persevering. Europe likely would not be free and united today. The Soviet Union would not be on the ash heap of history. Germany and Japan would not be democratic allies, and the Republic of Korea would most certainly not be an important ally in Asia and the 12th-largest economy in the world.

So, too, the sacrifices of today will over time prove the worth of this cause.

Now today is an opportunity to talk a bit about one very special reporter, who even I have to admit almost always gets it right -- or about right.

Q Thank you.

SEC. RUMSFELD: And who exemplifies the various -- very highest standards of integrity and professionalism, the dean of the Pentagon press corps, Charlie Aldinger of Reuters.

Now, when I heard Charlie was retiring, my first thought was, "He's too young. It's a very bad precedent, and I don't like it at all." But when you've had the career that Charlie has, covering seven secretaries of Defense -- count them -- amazing -- and working in the Pentagon for some 22 years -- two-plus decades is a long time. I -- even I have to agree that he deserves at least a break.

Charlie, we thank you for your professional reporting -- indeed, for your service to Reuters and to the truth. And we wish you and your dear wife Meg, who's here -- where's Meg? There she is -- the very best in the many years to come. Congratulations.

Now, we're going to -- we're going to get you up here in a minute.

Now, General Pace, what do you have to say?

GEN. PACE: Sir, I think the applause just said it all for Charlie. Thank you, sir, and we'll turn to you for the last of your softball questions.

Q For which I will get no answer.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Charlie, what do you have to say by way of a question?

Q Well, I would like to ask you about Iran, sir.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Mm-hmm?

Q You and General Pace and, indeed, the president and others have had intimated strongly in recent days that Iran is stirring -- actively stirring up violence in Iraq. You said that Revolutionary Guards and IEDs and weapons are moving across the border from Iran. What you have not said conclusively is whether the government of Iran and the mullahs are sponsoring that activity. Do you have proof that they are, indeed, behind this, the government of Iran?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Pete?

GEN. PACE: I do not, sir.

SEC. RUMSFELD: The -- let's disaggregate the question so that it's answerable with reasonable precision.

Q As in "avoided".

SEC. RUMSFELD: Charlie!

Q Okay.

SEC. RUMSFELD: As to equipment, unless you physically see it coming in -- in a government-sponsored vehicle, or with government-sponsored troops, you can't know it. All you know is that you find equipment -- weapons, explosives, whatever -- in a country that came from the neighboring country.

With respect to people, it's very difficult to tie a thread precisely to the government of Iran. As we all know, there are pilgrimages where Shi'a come from Iran and around the world to go to holy places in Iraq, and they come by the thousands, sometimes tens of thousands. And so, that is also a difficult -- in fact, there's one coming up very soon, a pilgrimage to the holy places there, in the next week or two, as I recall.

Now if, on the other hand, you have evidence, intelligence or physical evidence, that Revolutionary Guard or Qods Force people are in Iraq, you again can't -- it's entirely possible they're rogue elements, and they're just there on their own, or they're pilgrims. Not likely. And in this case, there has been evidence that Qods Force/Revolutionary Guard people have been and/or are in Iraq. And I think that it's -- a reasonable man test would suggest that they're not freelancing and they're not pilgrims.

Question?

Q So I'm -- excuse me. So -- I'm sorry --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Should we give him a little leeway --

Q Are you saying --

Q A little bit.

SEC. RUMSFELD: -- give him a little slack today?

Q A little slack.

Q Are you saying that you assume, then, that the government of Iran is supporting this effort toward increasing violence in Iraq?

SEC. RUMSFELD: The way I've put it is slightly different. I don't know that it's for me to make assumptions. I state what I know to be the case. It think it has been clearly expressed by the Iranian government that they're not enamored of the idea of a representative sectarian government in their neighboring country. They have different wishes for how Iran -- how Iraq might turn out. So clearly they are not on the side of those forces in the country that are eager to see that government come together and govern from the center and function in a manner that's respectful of all elements in Iraq, in a representative system, with a constitution that they've fashioned themselves, because that is so fundamentally contrary to the system that exists in Iran.

Q Mr. Secretary, the Joint Forces Command has put together a very interesting historical document, going back and talking to members of Saddam Hussein's regime and looking at documents to piece together what was going on in the government before the invasion and up until the point Saddam was toppled. I'm wondering if either of you or both of you have read any of that account, and what insights you take away from it with the -- now the perspective of hindsight, having been able to go in and actually see what's going on in the minds of some of the people who were in the Baghdad area.

SEC. RUMSFELD: You're quite right . It exists. It's fascinating. I've been briefed extensively on it, and I found it enormously helpful as a stand-alone document but also as a document standing next to the lessons learned from the coalition side. So you have the two that you can compare each other -- I think the Joint Forces Command did an excellent job.

Q Well, if you -- you said it was fascinating and you found it -- can you just tell us some of the insights that you learned from it or some of the things you thought were interesting about -- that you didn't know at the time that you now can look back and see?

GEN. PACE: We're inside of about 30 days, I think, of getting the final document cleared for publication. And it's not yet clear what in it might still be classified or not. So I would prefer not to make comments until we have the final clearance on publication. And that should be -- that should be relatively shortly.

Q Mr. Secretary, let me ask you about reports out of Baghdad today that a plot by al Qaeda to infiltrate their people into guard positions around the Green Zone and eventually to attack embassies has been foiled. I'm wondering whether you know either about the plot, about the foiling, and whether it raises heightened concerns about this whole process of turning over territory to the Iraqis.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Bob, I've heard about the report. I have not received anything definitive. First reports are what they are: first reports. They are often calibrated and adjusted later on. And I don't know that I would say that we've learned anything, at least at this stage that would suggest any important lessons. We've always known that there are people who have tried to infiltrate the various security forces and have tried to get close access to places that they ought not to be. There's nothing new about that that I know of.

Yes.

Q General Pace, you recently acknowledged the prospect, the potential for civil war in Iraq. And I'm just wondering if you could -- if you could tell me what it was that caused you to raise that prospect this week, and do you think this is the most perilous time for Iraqi democracy since the war began?

GEN. PACE: Well, I was responding to a question last night from a member of an audience over in Baltimore, and what I said was that there are -- both sides of the path have opened to the Iraqi people right now. There is the path toward civil war, and pieces of that path are in place. And there's the path to freedom and representative government and a prosperous future, and that right now the Iraqi people were -- through their government and with their government, were making the basic fundamental decisions which of those paths they

want to walk down. And right now, I believe that they have looked at the path that leads to civil war and decided they do not want to go in that direction, and they're very much looking toward how can they have a unified government and move down that path. And there are many, many more voices for unification and freedom amongst the leadership, both elected and religious, in that country than there are voices of opposition.

Q Mr. -- Mr. Secretary, you opened by saying that you had a conversation with Ambassador Khalilzad

--

SEC. RUMSFELD: Mm-hmm.

Q -- and that he said it was a good day politically. Can you share with us what developments there were that made it a good day?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I wouldn't want to, no. All he said was -- you know, he's working day and night and attempting to calibrate his involvement in a way that is appropriate. And he is constantly being sought out by the various elements asking him if he could be helpful with one of the other elements, as they go through their politicking and negotiating.

I guess the one thing I could say is that he felt that today in Iraq in large measure they were dealing with each other, which he found encouraging, as opposed to more leaning on him to talk to somebody else; that the principal players I think have looked at the situation, recognizes the importance of what they're required to do, what they need to do for the success of that country, and have gone about the business together of doing it. And he is -- I felt from the conversation -- and I hate to characterize a private conversation -- but I came away from the conversation with Zal with the feeling that he was encouraged because they were leaning less on him and more on themselves in their discussions and negotiations with each other, which I think is an encouraging sight.

Yes?

Q If I could follow up -- at the same time, though, on the streets of Baghdad, 80 more bodies, victims of executions of found; 50 killed in car bombings. That doesn't sound like a good day in Baghdad.

SEC. RUMSFELD: He did not say that, and I did not say that. I do not believe. I think I said from a governance standpoint, he felt he'd had a good day, and I think it would be unfortunate if somebody takes that and suggests that I think 87 people being killed is a good day. I --

Q But how do you balance the two? It seems like --

SEC. RUMSFELD: I don't. We do. You do. I do. The country. We all look at it and make a judgment, and you asked me about the conversation with Zal. I gave you an accurate characterization. And it is not to say that there are not -- is not violence in the country. There is violence in the country, and if every time I answer every single question I've got to box the compass, we're never going to get anywhere.

Q Mr. Secretary?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yes, sir?

Q What is the difference in your mind between sectarian violence and civil war?

SEC. RUMSFELD: You know, it's a good question, and we have been trying to look for a way to characterize what are the ingredients of a civil war, and how would you know if there was one, and what would it

look like, and what might be its progression, either up to increased violence or down to less violence. And it's a hard thing to do, and people are analyzing that and thinking about it. And I think until I've had a chance to think more about it and -- I will say, I don't think it'll look like the United States' civil war.

Q It sounds like you've war gamed the civil war.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Does it?

Q Have you?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I wouldn't --

Q Mr. Secretary --

Q Just -- could you answer that? Have you war gamed the civil war?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I wouldn't want to say that. It -- it would -- it sounds like we've used the National Training Center and conducted war games of a physical type. And no. But I -- is it true the people are -- in the intelligence community are thinking about this and analyzing it and doing red team -- A team/B team-type looks at it? Sure they are. And they should be. That's -- that's what people do. Do I think we're in a civil war at the present time? No.

(To General Pace.) Do you?

GEN. PACE: I do not, sir.

Q Mr. Secretary, do you think the danger of a civil war is greater now than ever before? By your definition?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Oh, I wouldn't want to say that. I just -- it seems to me that -- look, we'll all know more. The next day we learn more. I think if we get a government and the government is representative of the country and the government decides to govern from the center, and the elements, diverse elements in that country, which have spent decades not particularly liking each other and being somewhat fearful of each other, but held apart, basically, by a vicious repressive regime, killing hundreds of thousands of them in the process, I think once people get comfortable with the constitution and with the government reflecting that constitution, that that should have a beneficial effect. Can I prove it? No. Will we know soon? You bet. And is that soon enough for me? Yes.

Q Mr. Secretary, British Defense Secretary Reed announced that Great Britain is pulling about 10 percent of its troops -- about 800 now -- out of Iraq. Is it possible that the Defense secretary is sending a message to his friend and counterpart, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, to follow suit and start a withdrawal?

SEC. RUMSFELD: No. You should not assume that. I met with him -- I don't know -- weeks ago he was here, I believe. Or I met with him someplace in the world. And -- as I do frequently. And he told me exactly what they planned to do and that they feel that they've made good progress in passing over responsibility to the Iraqi security forces in the area that they operate in the southern part of Iraq, and that they felt they could do this. And my -- I've forgotten the timing he announced. You would probably know --

Q May.

SEC. RUMSFELD: In May -- that they'll be phasing down between now and May some 800 forces. But

he doesn't send signals. Come on, Ivan. We talk all the time. He's -- he -- we're all people, we just deal with each other in a very straight up, orderly way.

Q Mr. Secretary, you've spent a lot of time in recent speeches, including your opening statement today, talking about urging the American people to have patience with this war. How long should Americans expect U.S. troops to be fighting in Iraq? And is there a limit to the amount of time you're willing to give the Iraqis to really stand up? Three years, five years? Is there a limit?

Q For effect.

SEC. RUMSFELD: The -- we know that insurgencies can last five, eight, 10, 12, 15 years, and we've said that. We also know that insurgencies ultimately are defeated, not by foreign occupying forces but by the indigenous forces of that particular country. And that'll be the case in Iraq. Over time, the Iraqi people and the Iraqi security forces will cope with and deal with that insurgency. It won't be the American military or the coalition military that's there when that happens. It is -- that's been the case in any number of countries.

Now, the implication of your question is, do we think we're going to be there four or five years more, in terms of large numbers of U.S. ground forces? And the answer is no, I don't think so. Those are decisions for the president. They are decisions for the country.

But we are making excellent progress in training and equipping the Iraqi security forces. We have gone a step beyond that and are now training trainers who are able to do that. We have gone a step beyond that, and we are training the enablers, the people who do the combat support and the combat service support and the intelligence and the special operations and the things beyond the basic numbers of police and army. And they're learning. And they're progressing. And each day, each week, each month they get more experience at it, and they get better at it. And more people are available to do it. That's a good thing.

Now if -- are we passing over responsibility continuously? Yes. Does -- can I pick a date in -- I mean, we move troops in and out depending on events, like we did for the referendum, the election. There's a pilgrimage coming up. We may very well -- General Casey may decide he wants to bulk up slightly for the pilgrimage. And we're continuing to pull troops down. And we're continuing to shift our weight, as we've said, between the combat patrol aspects of it, over to the training and the equipping and providing the enablers.

Now if anyone in the world was smart enough to know precisely what the behavior of Iran, what the behavior of Syria, what the level of the insurgency would be; how fast they'll get a government; how confident the people will be in the new government, then one could probably draw a line and say, "Gee, the trajectory of our troop reduction ought to be about like this." But I don't know anyone that's smart enough to do that. There's just too many variables, and if you try to do it, all you do is embarrass yourself. And you know, life's embarrassing enough without trying that.

Q If the strategy for victory --

SEC. RUMSFELD: General Pace, why don't you grab a hold of this and dig me out of there, will you?

Q If the strategy for victory hinges on the Iraqis, and if the Iraqis --

SEC. RUMSFELD: And it's going well.

Q -- don't step up --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, why do you keep taking the negative, Bret? Why don't you take the positive?

Q Well, I'm just saying --

SEC. RUMSFELD: What if they do step up?

Q If you have to hold that bicycle a little bit longer than you thought --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Then you do, and you don't want to end up with a 40-year-old that can't ride a bike.

GEN. PACE: And there's also the fact that if you were to leave Iraq tomorrow, we would still have a long way ahead to defeat terrorism around the world. And we need as a nation to understand that, to understand that it takes decades for terrorist organizations to either be defeated or to lose their ideology and that -- although certainly not at the numbers we have deployed now -- that for the foreseeable future, we are going to need to have forces forward deployed around the world to be able to respond to terrorist threats to our country. And that will take a long time.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yes?

Q You mentioned the 80 -- 87 people who were killed apparently in sectarian --

SEC. RUMSFELD: I didn't. It came up in a question.

Q You -- okay. So 87 killed since Monday in what appears to be sectarian violence. Do you see the violence in Iraq changing in nature from insurgency to this sectarian violence?

And Mr. Chairman, if I can ask you, one of the comments you said last night was that everything is in place if the Iraqis want to have a civil war. I'm wondering if you can elaborate on that. What is the "everything" that's in place if they want to have a civil war?

GEN. PACE: I'll start, if I may, sir. What he's referring to in different words than I said today, which is that the paths are both there. The path to civil war is available to the Iraqi people, and the path toward freedom and representative government is available to them. And they are standing at the crossroads right now, and they are looking down both paths. And right now, it appears to me that for sure the Iraqi people want to go down the path toward prosperity and freedom, and the vast majority of their leaders, both elected and religious, are espousing calm and unity. So I am optimistic that they, in fact, are going to go down the path of prosperity for themselves and their government. But there is violence. There is sectarian violence. And folks could overreact to sectarian violence and take it down the wrong path.

Q And the question of the nature of the violence, are you seeing a change from --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Hard -- hard to disaggregate it. You know, if you think about it, you can have a terrorist in -- consciously do something for the purpose of inciting sectarian violence. You can have someone reacting to that and engaging in sectarian violence in retaliation. You could have either one -- a terrorist hire a criminal to go out and blow something up for their purpose, which was not sectarian violence, but possibly to incite sectarian violence, or to delay the formation of the new government, just as they tried to stop the first

election in January, as they tried to stop the referendum in October, and they tried to stop the December elections. Or you can have sectarian people hire criminals to go out and to do -- be their instruments of trying to retaliate against the other side.

So, to pretend that somebody can sit 7,000 miles away --
How far is it?

GEN. PACE: Seven thousand miles.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Plus or minus -- and know which numbers of those 87 people that -- I don't even know the number is 87. I know the report says 87, but I don't know that that's true, either. Nor, do I suspect, do you -- know how do you disaggregate that and say so many were in this category and so many were in that category. You can't know that. I don't know that. And I know I don't know that. And people who think they know probably don't.

Jim. We'll make this the last question. So make it a pip.

Q This is for General Pace. What have you found out about those killings? There's been a spate of these killings. Are they being carried out by the security forces? Are they being carried out by militias? And if so, which militia?

GEN. PACE: Yeah, I -- I cannot give you a satisfactory answer to that question because we're still looking into it. There have been reports of individuals in uniform that have done some of this, but we don't know if these are insurgents and terrorists wearing uniforms who are doing it. So, very unclear right now who is doing the killing. Some of it, for sure, are those who want to incite more sectarian violence. But the breakdown between who's doing it for political reasons and who's doing it for sectarian reasons, not yet clear.

SEC. RUMSFELD: You know, if you wanted to put up a scoreboard, you took the thrust of these questions, all of which are suggesting either we are in civil war, or we're close to civil war, or we might be in civil war, or the elements for civil war are present and indeed possibly dominant -- if you put up a scoreboard, and you said, "Gee, how's it going for the last year," they tried to stop the January election, and they failed. They tried to stop the October referendum, and they failed. They tried to stop the December election, and the terrorists failed. And those who have wanted sectarian violence -- it's been interesting to me, reading the intelligence and watching the public behavior of the various elements, are kind of adjusting their views.

If you think back, it wasn't -- how many months ago was it that the Sunnis wouldn't even participate in the election in January? And then they decided to participate in the constitution drafting. And then they decided to participate in the constitutional referendum. They were totally anti-coalition eight months ago. Today they look at the -- their percentage of population relative to the percentage of the Shi'a population, and they're kind of interested in the coalition and what we're doing. And they're not that eager to have us leave, and they are participating fully in the discussions about forming a government and who should be president and who should be prime minister.

So amidst the violence -- and I'll box the compass one more time -- which exists, let there be no doubt -- there's also a string of victories for those who want a single country, who want a representative system, who want a constitutional government and who are trying to form a new government. And that's a good thing. And it's worth at least mention as we conclude Charlie's last press conference.

Now, if we could consider the press conference adjourned --

Q Can I have the houselights, please?

COPYRIGHT 2005, FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC., 1000 VERMONT AVE. NW; 5TH FLOOR; WASHINGTON, DC - 20005, USA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. ANY REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION IS EXPRESSLY PROHIBITED. UNAUTHORIZED REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION CONSTITUTES A MISAPPROPRIATION UNDER APPLICABLE UNFAIR COMPETITION LAW, AND FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC. RESERVES THE RIGHT TO PURSUE ALL REMEDIES AVAILABLE TO IT IN RESPECT TO SUCH MISAPPROPRIATION. FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC. IS A PRIVATE FIRM AND IS NOT AFFILIATED WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. NO COPYRIGHT IS CLAIMED AS TO ANY PART OF THE ORIGINAL WORK PREPARED BY A UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT OFFICER OR EMPLOYEE AS PART OF THAT PERSON'S OFFICIAL DUTIES. FOR INFORMATION ON SUBSCRIBING TO FNS, PLEASE CALL JACK GRAEME AT 202-347-1400.

<http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2006/tr20060314-12644.html>