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

**March 28, 2006**

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## **DoD News Briefing with Secretary Rumsfeld and Gen. Pace from the Pentagon**

SEC. RUMSFELD: Good afternoon. Today the men and women serving in this Department of Defense mourn the death of former Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger. Cap Weinberger was a friend. His extensive career in public service, his support for the men and women in uniform, and his central role in helping to win the Cold War leave a lasting legacy. He left the United States armed forces stronger, our country safer, and the world more free. Certainly, I offer my deepest sympathy to his wife Jane and his family and his many friends throughout the world.

Recently, Iraq and coalition forces took steps to prevent terrorists from carrying out large-scale attacks in Iraq against the many hundreds and hundreds of thousands of Shi'a observing their religious event know as Arba'een. The observance, banned for three decades under Saddam Hussein, is a culmination of a pilgrimage to the Iraqi cities of Karbala and Najaf, where Shi'a Muslims gather each year to pay homage to the grandson of the prophet Mohammed. It's estimated that more than a million Shi'a traveled across the country, across Iraq, for the pilgrimage. Many slept in tents along the road.

Many wore black robes and held banners. Some walked with their children. They were thought to be easy and very visible targets for terrorists.

In 2004, terrorists killed more than 120 Iraqis and wounded around 300 during this period. In 2005, terrorists killed 33 Iraqis and wounded 130. This year it's estimated that 12 Iraqis were killed and two were wounded in connection with the pilgrimage. So this year's pilgrimage for the most part passed peacefully. Iraqi security forces -- benefitting from their increased numbers, there are now some 241,000 strong, and their additional training and experience -- performed well and took the lead in protecting their fellow Iraqis. Provincial governors, provincial police chiefs and Iraqi security personnel executed an extensive security plan. One Iraqi army captain said, "My soldiers have done a very good job following their orders, and I'm proud of how they kept things under control."

In a situation like exists in Iraq today, one measure of what is happening is to note things that are not happening. Admittedly, that's a difficult thing to do. It's far easier to report about a bomb that goes off than to note a bomb that doesn't. A car bomb that kills Iraqis outside a police recruiting station makes for a clearly understandable story compared to the fact that hundreds of Iraqis volunteer the next day, to step up to volunteer despite that attack.

The relative success of this year's Arba'een underscores the complexity of understanding the events that are taking place there. Of this event, there are questions one might ask: Is Iraq truly a country in uncontrollable chaos, as we occasionally are told? How are more than a million Iraqis able to move across the country with only a handful of incidents? If the coalition does not have an adequate number of forces on the ground, as some argue, how did the Iraqi forces with coalition support manage to protect millions of Iraqis? And if terrorists tried and failed to pull off a massive attack, what does this say about their strength and their capabilities?

These questions aren't easily answered, I admit, but they, it seems to me, are worth asking.

In closing, I'd like to mention that yesterday I visited Shanksville, Pennsylvania and paid my respects to the passengers who gave their lives in defiance of the hijackers and in defense of our country's Capitol on September 11th, 2001. The field there is hallowed ground dedicated to those selfless Americans who really the first to fight back in the post-9/11 war against terrorists.

And it's heart-warming that some 150,000 individuals, on their own time, at their own expense, visit that site each year to remember the heroes -- heroic passengers of Flight 93. I think it says a great deal about our country.

General Pace.

GEN. PACE: Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

I just spent this last week visiting with my counterparts in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, having dialogue about how our militaries can work more effectively and efficiently together. Each of those countries is fighting hard against terrorism inside their countries. They're working diligently to reduce transit of terrorists across their borders. And it was a good, open dialogue amongst our military folks.

I also had the opportunity in Pakistan to observe the U.S. forces who are there now, wrapping up a six-month operation in support of the Pakistan relief efforts. We can be very proud of what our folks have done in support of the Pakistan government. The Pakistan government can be very proud of what it did to support its own people.

With that, we'll answer your questions.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Bob?

Q Mr. Secretary, I'd like to ask you about the report that was issued last Friday by Joint Forces Command, in which they stated that the Russians had sent sensitive intelligence to the Iraqis, to Saddam Hussein, in the early days of the war. The report cited two captured Iraqi documents. But the authors of the report also concluded that "significantly, the regime was also receiving intelligence from the Russians." That's a direct quote. So my question to you is, if that's true, what was done to follow that up, to verify that and to get an explanation from the Russians? And if it wasn't true, why was it contained in this government report?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, I suspect it was -- what was in the government report characterized a document or some piece of information that existed. I haven't seen the specific reference in the report. And my understanding is that Secretary Rice has indicated that she's going to discuss that with the Russians.

Q But do you know this to be true? Have you --

SEC. RUMSFELD: No, I don't. It's something that obviously -- it merits looking into.

Q So you'd not previously been alerted to this item?

SEC. RUMSFELD: No.

Q Mr. Secretary, perhaps this is for General Pace, but -- either one of you or both of you. A possible downside to this pilgrimage would be agents coming across from Iran, not only members of their Republican Guard but also those skilled in bomb-making and others who would support the terrorists.

Does intel that you can share with us bear that out, that this was and is an increasing problem, specifically during the pilgrimage?

GEN. PACE: The intel would not verify one way or the other as far as whether or not it's an increase or decrease or how many. What I can tell you publicly is that the Iraqi government is certainly sensitive to the understanding that potentially inside those couple of million pilgrims there may be some few who are transporting or using that pilgrimage for other than going to pray. More than that I cannot tell you publicly other than to tell you that is an item of interest, anytime there's that kind of movement of people.

Q Can you expand a bit on the word "few"? I mean, are we talking a half a dozen, a dozen, two thousand?

GEN. PACE: I cannot. I do not know.

SEC. RUMSFELD: I'd like to go back to Bob's question.

There's been a good deal of discussion about the fact that the director of national intelligence is in the process of disgorging what will turn out to be millions of documents, I believe, ultimately, that were captured during the conflict. We also know that there were millions of documents destroyed, because as forces went into the buildings, they found systematic destruction of a great many documents -- burning and shredding and the like.

Given the fact that it's going to -- these things are mostly in Arabic and they're going to be put out by the government of the United States without, in many cases, having been read or translated or analyzed or checked, simply because the decision has been made that with a quick review a great amount of it is -- it's appropriate to put out a large amount of it. That being the case, there's going to be all kinds of things raised and questions raised. And needless to say, if one started trying to track down the things that exist in literally millions of documents, it would -- you wouldn't be able to do much else. It would -- you wouldn't be able to do much else. So what will happen will be that this will go out, and the important pieces will rise to the top. Some will be accurate, I'm sure; some will be inaccurate, I'm sure. Some will be rumor, some will be speculation. And people will have an opportunity to let the truth win out over time. And we'll find out what actually took place.

Q You both -- last week you were briefed twice on this report. Did anyone ever mention the Russian information to you when you were briefed on it?

GEN. PACE: Not that I recall.

Q And the two authors of the report told us --

SEC. RUMSFELD: This was weeks -- months ago that I was briefed on this. Many months.

Q The two authors of the report told us they were surprised by this information. Did it surprise either of you?

GEN. PACE: We still don't know whether or not the translation itself is a hundred percent accurate. We don't know it is -- if this is real information or disinformation. There's all kinds of pieces of this that need to be looked into.

Q They seem to believe it? The authors?

(No audible response.)

Q Mr. Secretary, did you --

Q I'm just following up on the same subject. Mr. Secretary, if you don't personally know this information about the allegations about the Russians to be true, was it appropriate to put it in a public report like this? And does the United States owe Russia an explanation for doing so?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I'm sure if anyone is owed anything, they will get it. (Scattered laughter.) But the idea that we're supposed to know what's going to be in every single document or report that comes out of this department is obviously -- it doesn't quite appreciate the hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of reports that are put out.

Q This is a subject that you've talked about many times publicly, the importance of protecting the integrity of classified information. Here in a wartime setting, another country is providing sensitive information to the enemy seems like just the kind of thing that you'd be much concerned about.

SEC. RUMSFELD: It certainly would be something that one would look into.

Q Should you have been told about it?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Oh, I'm not going to criticize somebody for not calling it to my attention previously. We'll sort through it.

Q Sir, to follow up, CENTCOM said that they are not and have no plans to investigate whether or not there was somebody, as these documents suggest, at CENTCOM leaking sensitive information that could jeopardize U.S. troops to the Russians. Isn't that a subject --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Who at CENTCOM said that?

Q The spokesperson for CENTCOM.

SEC. RUMSFELD: I don't know. I didn't see that.

Q But, I mean, that's the other part of the equation here. I mean, shouldn't we be investigating whether or not there was --

SEC. RUMSFELD: There are people in the department who have the responsibility for looking into things like that.

Q It's not being looked into, though. Do you think it should be?

SEC. RUMSFELD: If it should be, it will.

Q But do you think it should be? This is a serious question.

SEC. RUMSFELD: I'd have to go back and read it carefully and see what credence one ought to give to it and see what we may have discovered through other channels, and then make a decision.

Yes?

Q Mr. Secretary, on Sunday there was a coalition operation whereby -- which included both Iraqi and U.S. Special Forces in an attack on a compound in Baghdad.

SEC. RUMSFELD: About three-to-one Iraqi security forces, special operations forces.

Q Right. But in that operation, it was first reported that the initial target were armed militia, possibly members of the Mahdi Army. Does this signal a new tactic in going -- in pursuing these armed militias more aggressively in Iraq?

GEN. PACE: First of all, this was an operation that was conducted by Iraqi special operations forces, and it was briefed, as you know, in Baghdad by their troops.

We did bring some pictures to be able to show you here.

If I could have the first one.

This is the area we're talking about.

The target area is here. And this complex is an old school complex, I believe to hold, among other things, the hostage ring, people who grab people off the street for money. The Iraqi special operators came into this area here and here to cordon off. These areas in red, over the course of the operation, are buildings from which the Iraqi security forces' cordon took fire. And the Iraqi forces themselves went into the main target areas -- the one with the red dot -- into the main target area. This is the building inside of which, once they got in there, they found a small minaret and a prayer room.

Next picture, please.

These are some of the things they found inside of that compound -- some RPGs --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Those are not religious instruments.

GEN. PACE: -- and the like.

Next picture, please.

And these are parts of IEDs. So inside of this compound that they went into looking for hostages -- and oh, by the way, they did find a hostage bound inside this facility. When the hostage was released, he pointed to two of the individuals who the Iraqi security forces had detained as being his kidnapers.

So this is a very good operation on the part of the Iraqi Special Operations forces into a compound that turned out to have other than religious pilgrims in it.

SEC. RUMSFELD: They also found at least two people who had traces of explosives on their fingers.

Q But besides the hostage, the initial reports indicated that the target for this assault were armed militias that had possibly been responsible for some of the abuses, the executions, the beheadings, the bodies that have been found in Baghdad recently --

SEC. RUMSFELD: I think the answer to your question is that it's -- I'm not in a position to say that there's been any change in the policy. The Iraqi government, to the extent they decide to make a change, would announce it themselves. And this was an Iraqi-led security operation.

Q But is it an indication of the beginning of a crackdown against the --

SEC. RUMSFELD: It's one point -- it's one dot. And I don't think there's a lot to connect to it at this moment.

Furthermore, I would say that -- it strikes me that the situation they're in -- negotiating to finish the adjustments to the constitution, negotiating as to who will serve in what post, and what other things they may want to decide politically -- is probably not a time when the government is going to be making big announcements on changes in policy.

So I think that this was what it was -- just my guess.

Q So this attack was not the announcement? I mean it seems to be a pretty dramatic step in going after the militias themselves.

SEC. RUMSFELD: As I say, I think at the -- if the new government, when it gets in place, and we hope that's soon, if they have announcements to make, they'll make it. But that was not an announcement. It was an operation that they conducted.

Bret.

Q Mr. Secretary, because of this operation, many Shi'ite leaders have said that they're postponing negotiations on the formation of that government. You've been concerned about that delay. Do you have any message for them today?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, I think they're now back talking. We just off a secure video with the ambassador, Zal Khalilzad, and General Casey and General Abizaid, and the discussions are going forward. And I hope they'll sort it out soon. It's important that the key political figures in that country recognize that 10 or 12 million Iraqis went out and voted, and it's their responsibility to fashion a government under that successful vote, December 15th, under their new constitution, which was ratified October 15th, and come forward to the parliament with their proposals. And the sooner they do it, the better.

Q General Pace, just to follow up, sir, there have been mass kidnappings in great numbers, it seems, in recent days and maybe the past two weeks -- broad daylight. Is this a new thing that you're seeing from the enemy? Do you believe it's terrorists dressed as Iraqi commandos kidnapping these people, or are these kidnapping rings that -- like the one you saw in this raid perhaps?

GEN. PACE: I'm not sure the extent to which the kidnappings are divided amongst terrorists and kidnapping rings. This operation clearly was designed to go after a believed location of a kidnapping ring.

Q General Pace, what's your best military assessment and advice at the moment about the threat to Iraq's stability posed by Muqtada al-Sadr and the Mahdi militia? What threats do you believe they currently pose to stability in Iraq? And what's your best military assessment, then, of the overall security situation in Baghdad?

GEN. PACE: As I understand the intent of the Iraqi government, it is that all armed forces inside Iraq will be national forces subordinate to the national government. Any forces that are operating outside of that construct are a threat to stability in the country. They need to either disband or become part of the forces that are loyal to the Iraqi government. If not, over the long run the Iraqi government's going to need to deal with them.

Q What do you think -- what role do you think Muqtada al- Sadr's playing at the moment in this current violence and instability? What's he up to?

GEN. PACE: Not -- not clear. Not clear. But it is clear that militias not loyal to the government have, in fact, participated in killing of various members of various sects. That is not acceptable, it's not good. It needs to be dealt with. But how much of the violence belongs to one militia or another is not clear.

Q And if that really had -- I'm sorry, but just to clarify your statement over there, if the room had a -- the room had a minaret inside of the room?

GEN. PACE: No. When they got inside the building -- a big, rectangular building that had "Target 1" listed on it, the one that has a little red dot in the middle of it? When they got into that compound, they found that there was a building there that had a small minaret and a prayer room inside it. Some people are calling that a mosque. But that's what they found when they got in.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Pam.

Q Sir, yesterday when you spoke at the War College you gave the U.S. a pretty bad grade in its performance --

SEC. RUMSFELD: A passing grade. (Laughter.)

Q Well, not in my family, a "D". (Laughter.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: O-o-o-oh! O-o-o-oh! (Laughs.)

Q -- for the U.S. performance in the war of ideas. And I think this latest is maybe an example of how the other side is triumphing, by turning this into an issue about a mosque. What is -- you've been very clear in what you think our responsibility is in the failure in the war of ideas, but what is going on here? How do you describe the problem, and how do you fix it?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I think it's a tough -- sure. It's a very tough thing to do. When something happens, the people we're up against are vicious, and they lie. And they are -- obviously, they have media committees, they plan what they're going to do, they plan how they're going to manipulate the press, and they get out there fast and do it. And there's no penalty for that. Indeed, there's only rewards, because the misinformation race is around the world while, as they say, truth is still putting its boots on. Our task is to figure out what actually happened. And that means that they've got to go in there and talk to people, and it takes time, and it takes 24 hours, 48 hours, whatever it takes. And they end up -- some cases, it takes weeks to figure out what actually took place.

And it's just very difficult. And here we are, in the 21st century, with all these means of communication and information racing around the globe, and it just makes it a very tough thing to do.

And clearly the United states government has not gotten to the point where we are as deft and clever

and facile and quick as the enemy that is perfectly capable of lying, having it printed all over the world, and there's no penalty for having lied. Indeed, there was a reward, because great many people read the lie and believed it. And it takes weeks and weeks afterwards to figure what actually took place.

I mean, I didn't know until this morning the details that Pete briefed here, nor did he, for that matter. And

--

Q So why not? Why -- if the Iraqi -- if we're working with the Iraqi special forces, don't we have some knowledge of the operation that they're about to undertake --

SEC. RUMSFELD: If we make a mistake, if we jump out and make a mistake, there's a penalty for it. If they jump out and lie, there's no penalty for that.

So our people -- they go out on an operation. There were -- I don't know; I'm going to guess 60, 80, 90 Americans, coalition forces and 180, I think it was, Iraqi forces. And they go out on an operation, and they come back. And they then go about the business of giving a report as to what took place that they saw, these pieces.

The next thing you know, out come the claims as to what took place. And that's spread all over the world, and then you start asking, "Well, what really happened?" Well, then you go to these people and try to find out what really happened. And it takes 24, it takes 48 hours.

And I don't know any solution to that, except that, you know, if you live in a small town, and one guy walks around the corner and lies to you one day, and he walks around the corner and lies to you the next day, and he walks around the corner and lies to you the third day, pretty soon you say to yourself, "That's a liar."

Q (Off mike.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: "That's lying Joe." Don't believe what he says! Don't put it in the newspaper! Don't print it! Don't repeat it! Because it's probably not true, because he's a liar.

Q Isn't the problem that the Iraqi people are so willing to believe that?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Sure. Of course it's a problem. It's a complicated problem. And there's no one location for blame. And the D-plus I think I gave -- (scattered laughter) -- passing grade -- is for all of us, in my view. It is not just for the people out there or the people here or the people on that side of the podium or the people on this side of the podium. I think it's -- goodness knows, we haven't figured out how to solve it, and we're trying.

Q Well, why didn't you embed reporters with the mission?

Q Yeah.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Listen, the Iraqis can embed people any time they want, and they do. Our people embed people any time someone walks up. I've talked to people in -- who've -- asked them if they've been embedded, and they say, "Oh, we can't be embedded because our colleagues look down on us if we've been embedded. They say we're -- we're being spoon-fed" -- and that type of thing.

So the --

Q Hundreds of reporters were embedded when the war started --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Of course. And they still are -- anyone who wants to. Do you want to go get embedded? Raise your hand. Go do it! Don't sit here and talk about it!

Q In Operation --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Get out there!

Q In Operation Swarmer there were no reporters embedded there.

SEC. RUMSFELD: It's not because they're being prevented. There are opportunities for people to be embedded, and there are people currently embedded.

Q Mr. Secretary?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Just a second. Just a second.

(To staff) Bryan, is that correct or incorrect?

BRYAN WHITMAN (Pentagon spokesman): In terms of embedding?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yes.

MR. WHITMAN: Yes, reporters embedded? Yes, sir. And there are more opportunities that are --

Q For Swarmer?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I just don't know one operation. But I -- I do know that embedding is available. And if anyone here is feeling hurt and left out because they volunteered repeatedly to be embedded and were turned down, give your name to Bryan and we'll work out something for you.

Q Mr. Secretary?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Jim.

Q General, could you clarify something? The minaret -- the building with the minaret that was in the compound, were people killed in that building? And if they were, were they armed?

SEC. RUMSFELD: You saw the pictures of the weapons in the building.

Q Well, I know. Well, but the general also said that the fire came from outside the compound and --

GEN. PACE: There was firing from inside the compound. I cannot tell you whether or not there was actually somebody in the minaret firing or not. I can tell you that the minaret was part of the compound itself, that big rectangle you saw on the corner of the photo. That was the target area. Did not know that that minaret was there on the way in; discovered it once in there. All I'm saying is that there was a minaret, there was a prayer room in this compound. But all the other things I showed you were in the compound. Whether they were taken out of the prayer room or the minaret, I'd have to get you the details on. I do not know those facts.

Q Do you know whether people were killed in the prayer room?

GEN. PACE: I do not.

Q Because that seems to be the issue.

GEN. PACE: I don't know. We can find out. I don't know that.

SEC. RUMSFELD: We do know that the Iraqi security forces have a practice that if they're fired at from a structure, that they feel free to go into that structure and prevent the firing and the killing of Iraqi security forces.

Thanks very much, folks.

Q Did any Americans engage or was it only Iraqis that engaged the enemy fighters? Do we know that?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I think it was briefed yesterday by the people on the spot, and I would ask them. They came out and gave a good briefing, I think.

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