



U.S. Department of Defense

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Presenter: Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld

**June 8, 2006
9:09 a.m. EDT**

DoD News Briefing with Secretary Rumsfeld from Nato Headquarters, Brussels

SEC. RUMSFELD: Good afternoon.

We have completed most of our meetings. We have an additional session later this afternoon with the minister of Defense of Ukraine, which I look forward to. Earlier today we had the minister of Defense of Afghanistan who was with us, Minister Wardak, and had an important discussion about the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan and NATO's growing role. I'm confident that NATO will be able to perform in its responsibilities in Afghanistan successfully. We had discussions about the NATO response force and the importance of achieving full operational capability this year, and discussion on a number of other matters.

This morning I also informed our colleagues that last evening U.S. forces in Iraq, in a town called Baqubah, killed Abu Musaab Zarqawi, the leading terrorist in Iraq and one of the three senior al Qaeda leaders worldwide. In addition, we've had a significant accomplishment in Iraq with the selection by the prime minister, and the broad agreement, of a new Defense minister, and a new Interior minister, and also a National Security official. Those posts have taken a long time. December 15th was the election. The reason they've taken a long time is because to the great credit of the prime minister, Mr. Maliki, he made a decision that those posts would not be part of the spoils system of the electoral process, but instead, that they would be individuals who were highly competent, who would govern from the center, who would manage those critically important departments in a way that left no doubt in the minds of the Iraqi people that they were being run in a fair and non-sectarian manner. It took him a long time to work that out with all the various factions in that country, but it's a momentous step to have achieved that. And we look forward to working with those ministers.

A word about Zarqawi. I think, arguably, over the last several years, no single person on this planet has had the blood of more innocent men, women and children on his hands than Zarqawi. He personified the dark, sadistic and medieval vision of the future of beheadings and suicide bombings and indiscriminate killings, a behavior pattern that has been rejected by the overwhelming majority of the Iraqi people, whether Sunni, Shi'as or Kurds, and certainly by the overwhelming majority of Muslims worldwide.

I think it's appropriate the man who tried to stop the elections a year ago January, who tried to stop the drafting -- and failed; who tried to stop the drafting of the constitution and the referendum on the constitution last October and failed; who tried to stop the elections December 15th and failed; and tried to stop the formation of a new Iraqi government and failed, on the very day that the elected officials of that country were able to finalize their ministries.

With the announced nominations of the new Ministry of Interior and Defense and the chief of the National Security, the government will be complete, and we certainly do look forward to working with them.

I should add that given the nature of the terrorist networks -- really a network of networks -- the death of Zarqawi, while enormously important, will not mean the end of all violence in that country, and one ought not to take it as such. But let there be no doubt, his -- the fact that he is dead is a significant victory in the battle against terrorism in that country and I would say worldwide because he had interests well outside of Iraq. He was an integral part of the global war on terror.

And I think it's important to congratulate certainly the new prime minister but also General Casey and his troops for the wonderful job they're doing there.

I'd be happy to respond to some questions.

Yes.

Q Mr. Secretary, Pravo daily newspaper, the Czech Republic.

When did you first heard or learn the news about Zarqawi? And how many forces do you think would be needed to effectively control the Afghan complicated territory?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I don't recall the time. It was last evening. I received a call from General Casey shortly after -- they had been tracking Zarqawi, and they came to a conclusion that they could not really go in on the ground without running the risk of having him escape. So they used airpower and attacked the dwelling that he was in having a meeting.

They got in there shortly thereafter and had a positive identification as much as you can do with simply looking at a person and checking for known markings. They then took fingerprints and sent them back to -- and had them checked against Zarqawi's fingerprints and confirmed it later that night.

The number of forces in Afghanistan -- I don't know.

I think we've currently got about 20,000 in there. The Afghans are working their way up to many tens of thousands, and as they gain experience and get better equipment, obviously, they'll take over more of the responsibility. And then, the NATO forces are there, plus -- you know, there's 42 countries participating in the coalition in Afghanistan. It's impressive. The 26 NATO nations, and then, today we had meetings not just with the NATO nations on Afghanistan, but with, I think, 14 or 16 other countries that were here, who are in way or another assisting in that coalition effort in Afghanistan, all of whom have troops or people on the ground of one nature or another. The -- some of them are participating in provincial reconstruction teams, and they may have some civilians participating.

But the number will vary depending on the situation and the season. For example, this is now the season when the Taliban get more active as the weather improves, and then it'll die down again. But I'd leave it to the commanders in the field to figure out what they think they need. We move troops in and out depending on the situation.

Yes? Whoops! We're not going to have you a question. There's no way to get to the mike to you. There you go.

Q (Name inaudible) -- from Repubblica, Italy. Mr. Secretary, did you discuss with the new Italian

minister the withdrawal of the Italian troops from Iraq? And would that affect the overall effort of coalition?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Affect what? The overall what?

Q Effort of the coalition.

SEC. RUMSFELD: I'm sorry. I can't understand.

Q Effort.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Effort. Effort. I did discuss it with the minister. And no, it won't. (Laughter.) You know, we've got a job to do there, and we're going to get it done. And countries will adjust their numbers of forces depending on their circumstance. Each country has to do what they think is appropriate and when they think it's appropriate. And we're going to -- as I think I said, the Iraqi forces, there's 263,000 or (2)67,000, and there will be adjustments in coalition numbers, just as there will adjustments in U.S. numbers, and we'll proceed and get the job done. Yes?

Q Thank you very much. I'm Mike Yusef (sp) from the (Nile ?) News, Egyptian Television. Mr. Rumsfeld, can you just explain to us, when you announced the death of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi during the meeting, how the ministers did receive this information?

Thank you.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Positively. (Laughter.)

Yes?

Q Can you tell us whether --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Get a mike. Get a mike. There you go.

Q New York Times. When General Casey called you last evening apropos the raid on Zarqawi, was he notifying you that he was proceeding with airpower, or was he asking your approval to use airpower because of concern for potential collateral damage?

And on Afghanistan, is it --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Let me answer them one at a time.

Q Okay.

SEC. RUMSFELD: The answer is no.

Q Okay.

SEC. RUMSFELD: He announced that they had made a decision that that was appropriate. That's exactly correct. And he was simply informing me that they at that stage were putting people in on the ground and would have information, but that it would take some hours to validate it with fingerprints, and the like.

Q And can I ask on Afghanistan? Is it agreed now when you might move into Phase 4 of the ISAF

plan?

SEC. RUMSFELD: No. No, I don't think we discussed that. Well, it did come up. General Jones talked about. But in terms of timing, Phase 4 ought to, in my view, and I think everyone's view, ought to depend on have you fully resourced three, stage three, and are you in place, and how's it going. But we've worked out most of the details in connection with four in terms of command and control, and rules of engagement, and that type of thing. But it's more a matter of finishing three and getting that right, and then resourcing four and proceeding. But there was no timetable set, and I think it's more fact-based rather than calendar-based.

Yes? Q Mr. Secretary, the death of Zarqawi is a symbolic victory. To what extent do you expect it to affect what used to be called the "Zarqawi network" and --

SEC. RUMSFELD: It doesn't help the network. (Laughter.)

Q But do you expect it to --

SEC. RUMSFELD: It hurts it.

Q Do you expect another leader to take his place, in other words --

SEC. RUMSFELD: It makes life more difficult.

Q -- and to continue the same sorts of things Zarqawi was doing?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well of course, there'll always be someone who will pop up. But this fellow was the mastermind of that network.

And he was involved in the financing of it. He was involved in activity outside of Iraq. And he had a number of people with him who were also killed, which is a good thing. And I suspect that it will slow them down.

There are going to be people who are determined to kill innocent men, women and children, and others will come along. But in terms of someone who has gotten up that high and been that effective in killing -- literally thousands of Iraqis were killed by this man. He was, I believe, filmed cutting off someone's head. Baqubah, where he was found, was the area where the -- whatever it was, 10 or 17 beheaded heads were found in garbage bags. That area was right where that occurred.

STAFF/Q (?): (Off mike.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: It always worries me when someone is that determined. (Laughter.)

Q Alexander Miyei (ph) from Novaya Gazeta, Russia. Secretary, can you comment on the situation of international Sea Breeze exercises in Crimea, Ukraine? What expect you to do; to go and postpone, cancel, or what?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I can't comment on it. I haven't been involved in the details of it.

Yes? Need the mike. Good. He's way back there in the middle. He sat where he -- there. Good.

Q (Name inaudible) -- (Vercernje ?) Novosti daily from Belgrade. I would like to ask you about Kosovo, how you judge the situation in Kosovo in the light of the fact that KFOR will renew one base in north

part of Kosovo and -- (inaudible) -- send 500 policemen more in this part of Kosovo. Does it mean that you have expectation that security situation could be worse or deteriorate?

SEC. RUMSFELD: No, it does not mean that. Kosovo came up in the discussions. It's moving to an important point with respect to its status. General Jones has fashioned an organizational arrangement, a command relationship, which we believe is vastly superior to what had existed previously and will improve the capabilities of NATO forces and all the forces in that country. I think the questions now -- and we all agree that we -- the principle of "first in together, out together" would persist and that we would see this through.

The -- I think the questions that came up in the meetings today were the kinds of things that what ought a Kosovo force look like and what ought NATO's role be in assisting Kosovo in fashioning some sort of a follow-on capability.

But my personal view is that because of the way the -- General Jones has refashioned the command, that they'll be able to do more with fewer troops at some point and are much better arranged today for any difficulties.

Thank you, folks!

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