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Presenter: Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld and Commander, Multinational Force Iraq, Gen. George Casey

**June 22,
2006**

DoD News Briefing with Secretary Rumsfeld and Gen. Casey from the Pentagon

SEC. RUMSFELD: Good afternoon, folks. You may have noticed that General Casey's here with me, and I am very pleased that he's here. General George Casey is, of course, the commanding general of the Multinational Force in Iraq. He's going to be able to provide an update on what's taking place over there, our efforts to help the new Iraqi government gain control and assume control over their country's security.

I should add that the American people and the coalition nations are very fortunate to have a man of his enormous talent doing such a superb job for the coalition and for the American people and for the men and women in uniform over there.

Some time ago, one of Iraq's leading terrorists stated, I quote, "If, God forbid, the Iraqi government is successful and takes control of the country, we'll just have to pack up and go somewhere else or die." That was Zarqawi while he was still alive.

It's fitting that the completion of the new Iraqi government coincided with his death. Zarqawi had orchestrated attacks against coalition forces in Iraq, was said to have personally beheaded Nicholas Berg; was linked to the murders of nearly 60 innocent men and women at a wedding in Amman, Jordan, among his many other acts of terrorism and murder.

It's important to note that the elimination of Zarqawi took time, patience and persistence, and intelligence was the key. Unquestionably, the American people are safer today because they have invested in these efforts over time. Similarly, I believe that we'll reach the same conclusion on the efforts in Iraq generally. This is also taking time and taking patience, and it has come at a cost, and intelligence has again proved to be vital. We have had to adjust our efforts, just as the enemy has adjusted their efforts, and that process will continue.

Ultimately, however, America will be a safer place because the Iraqi government fights terrorists rather than funds them, and is our ally rather than an adversary in the struggle against violent extremists.

The terrorists seem to be getting the message. A document recently found in a terrorist safe house discussed, quote, "the current bleak situation" that the terrorists are facing in Iraq. It stated, quote, "The forces of the Iraqi National Guard have succeeded in forming an enormous shield protecting the American forces." And it's noted the coalition's success in undertaking massive arrest operations, confiscating weapons, and tightening terrorist access to financial resources.

So, where you stand depends on where you sit. And if one reverses things and looks at it from the perspective of the terrorists, it's not a pretty picture. And that's because of the excellent work being done by General Casey and his folks in Iraq.

General Casey.

GEN. CASEY: Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

It's been about five months since I've been here talking to you. I've seen several of you over in Iraq. But let me just give you a short overview, because, as you know, as well as I, there's been a lot going on in Iraq over the last five months.

First of all, Iraq has today a government of national unity. Two weeks ago, with the selection of the final three ministers, that government was fully formed. It is probably the single most important element of the political -- future political success in Iraq. Two weeks is not enough time to judge any government, and it's going to take a few months for them to get their legs under them. But what I've seen with the prime minister and the ministers that I interact with, it's heartening to me. They've been quick out of the box with the detainee release of about 2,500 prisoners to reinforce their commitment to national unity. They have implemented a vigorous Baghdad security plan that's been going on now for about a week, an attempt to bring security to the capital. They've announced that the first Iraqi province, Muthanna, will transition to a provincial Iraqi control here sometime in the next few weeks, which is a -- which is the first of what I think you'll see will be several positive steps with the provinces here over the course of this year and into next year. And the prime minister is working on his national reconciliation program that he expects to present to the parliament here in the next week or so.

The national unity government is committed to unity, security and prosperity. And they fully understand that to get prosperity, you have to have security, and to get security, you have to have unity. And they're committed to reconciliation, national reconciliation. And that is an extremely positive step.

Second, the security environment is quite complex. And it's a constantly changing environment, but it has increased in its complexity, really, since the December elections and in the aftermath of the Samarra bombing.

Now, with respect to al Qaeda. Al Qaeda is hurt in the aftermath of Zarqawi's death, both because of his -- it's a loss of leadership, and two, because of the numerous operations that have been conducted in -- as a result of information found in the course of raids that led to the killing of Zarqawi. They're hurt, but they're not finished. And they won't be finished for some time. But as you saw in the documents that the secretary quoted to you, they are -- they're feeling the pain right now.

But as you also see, they are still quite capable of conducting terrorist acts across Iraq.

The second big security challenge that adds to the complexity of the environment are these illegal armed groups. And I say illegal armed groups rather than militias because militias take people in too many different directions. These illegal armed groups are operating outside the rule of law. They are not the nine groups of militia that are mentioned in the CPA law that fought Saddam. These are criminals. And they need to be dealt with through a combination of political influence and security forces, and they will be. This government has stepped up to the challenge, has issued instructions for enforcing weapons bans in and around Baghdad, and is committed to dealing with the militia -- I'm sorry -- with the illegal armed group issue to protect their citizens.

The third element that adds complexity to the security environment is the fact that the resistance, the Sunni insurgency, has been since the elections reaching out and looking for ways to reevaluate their options

and to come out of the resistance against occupation with honor. And we are --we and the Iraqi government have several different strands of contacts going on, and there are opportunities in that regard that we just haven't had before.

And the fourth element that I'd suggest to you that adds complexity to the security environment is Iran. And we are quite confident that the Iranians, through their covert special operations forces, are providing weapons, IED technology and training to Shi'a extremist groups in Iraq, the training being conducted in Iran and in some cases probably in Lebanon through their surrogates. They are conducting -- using surrogates to conduct terrorist operations in Iraq, both against us and against the Iraqi people. It's decidedly unhelpful.

Now, lastly I'd just say a word about the insurgency. People say the insurgency's growing because attacks are up. Now, what I'd tell you it's more complex. It's more complex than the insurgency is growing. The insurgency hasn't expanded. Fourteen of the 18 provinces still have about nine attacks a day or less. And if you look at where the sectarian violence is occurring, it's occurring within about a 30-mile -- 90 percent of it is occurring in about a 30- mile radius around Baghdad; some down in Basra, some in Diyala Province, the majority right there in the center of the country. So, much more complex environment, not necessarily a worse security environment.

Third point, the progress of the Iraqi security forces. The progress with the army continues to go well. Today there are three Iraqi divisions, 18 Iraqi brigades and some 69 Iraqi battalions that are actually operating in the lead across Iraq. To put that in perspective for you, six months ago one division, four brigades and 23 battalions. So great progress here over six months.

We expect that progress to continue, and I expect fully by the end of the summer some 75 percent of the Iraqi brigades will be in the lead, and by the end of the year, eight or nine of the 10 Iraqi divisions, all but eight or nine or 10 of the Iraqi divisions will be in the lead. So moving forward with the army quite well.

The police. There are challenges with the police that I think you know, and the performance of the police varies widely around the country. In some places, in the north and in the south, the police do actually fairly well. In some of the more difficult areas, they have problems. And in some places, primarily in the Baghdad area, we see militia influence inhibiting their ability to do their jobs.

Probably the greatest challenge for the new minister of Interior is to restore the confidence of the Iraqi people in general and the Sunni population in particular in the Ministry of Interior forces. It is not an insoluble task.

And lastly, the ministerial capacity of both the Ministry of Interior and Defense to sustain, organize, train and equip the forces continues to develop. And it will take us some time.

As you know, we've been through three ministers here now in two years, and it just -- it will take some time to get that going. But by and large, good progress for the Iraqi security forces.

All those three things said -- because of the government of national unity, the progress of the Iraqi security forces, and the determination of the Iraqi people to go forward -- I believe that Iraq is well-postured to move this process forward in a very positive direction.

SEC. RUMSFELD: I'd like to suggest, when we turn to questions, that people ask a single question, in which case we'll have time to get around to more people, just as a courtesy to all of you. It makes, really, no difference to me. We have your interests at heart, I want you to know that. (Laughter.)

GEN. CASEY: If I could, I'd just close with a few words about the magnificent performance of the men

and women of the American armed forces. And to the families who have lost loved ones, particularly the Babineau, Menchaca and Tucker families, and to the families of deployed soldiers who make great sacrifices every day while their soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines are deployed, both those groups are in our thoughts and prayers all the time.

And I continue to be impressed with the courage, commitment and professionalism of the magnificent men and women of our armed forces and of the coalition forces. This is the third corps that I've seen rotate through, and every group is as committed and as driven as the group before them, and they're just doing an absolutely magnificent job there. And the American people can be very proud of what they've accomplished in Iraq.

Thank you very much.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Bob.

Q Mr. Secretary, having discussed current conditions in Iraq with General Casey, including the points he just outlined, where do you stand today on decisions to reduce the size of the U.S. force in Iraq over the coming months?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Where we were; that we have asked General Casey and the ambassador to work with the new Iraqi government, which is now in place for the first time, and with the new ministers and the prime minister, to develop a way ahead that they're comfortable with and that we're comfortable, as the Iraqi forces continue to take over bases and provinces and areas of responsibility and move into the lead. We expect that General Casey will come back and make a recommendation after he's had those discussions, which he has not yet had.

Q Mr. Secretary?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yeah.

Q One question, but with one prelude. Some members of the Army here are saying that General Casey is going to announce today perhaps a 2,000 --

SEC. RUMSFELD: They were wrong.

Q Very good.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Not surprising.

Q May I have my question?

SEC. RUMSFELD: It happens from time to time.

Q (Off mike) -- my question, then.

SEC. RUMSFELD: There are hundreds of thousands of people in the Department of Defense who could say something and be --

Q Thank you. My question again, sir, to General Casey, if I may. General, I know this going to be painful for you, but the American public would like to know definitively the type of barbarous and the brutality that our GIs face over there. No one has talked about what has happened to these two captured and killed GIs.

Can you be explicit? Were they decapitated? If so, were the bodies dumped by the -- were the heads dumped by the bodies? What else can you tell us?

GEN. CASEY: Yeah, I can't and I won't. That's something that we're leaving to the families. And I don't think that's my purview to get out there and be talking about that.

Q Just to follow up. The families would like to know, as would we, because perhaps in some bizarre way, even though this is tragic, it's going to turn out to be positive for America, because traditionally, when Americans get mad enough, they tend to get behind situations like this. If you can give us a hint at all, we'd be most appreciative.

GEN. CASEY: Yeah, I can't comment on the impact on the American population. I can just say that this is an indicator of the type of enemy that we are fighting. It's why we're there, and it's why we're fighting terrorism in Iraq, so we don't have to fight it here.

But the family will be notified about -- as the autopsies are completed here. And I just don't think it's my business to be out talking about that. That's up to them.

Q General, about the deaths of those three soldiers, we're told that they were -- when they were attacked on Friday, that they were essentially by themselves with a single humvee guarding a bridge across a canal.

Can you shed any light on how it is they came to be in such a vulnerable position? Was it by accident, was it by design? Were there any events prior to the attack that resulted in them being there? Can you shed any light on how that happened?

GEN. CASEY: We have been -- we have -- up until yesterday we've been focusing our efforts on recovering them and getting them back. General Thurman, the division commander, has directed an investigation to answer exactly those questions. So I can't shed any more light on it than you already know.

Q You don't know anything now about what happened in this case?

GEN. CASEY: We're going to let the investigation run its course, and then we'll give you a full accounting when it's completed.

Yeah.

Q General, in describing Iran's role in providing training and weapons for some of the insurgent or Shi'a inside Iraq, you used the word "surrogates." Does that mean that Iranians are actually directing these attacks? And if so, what is the United States military and, Mr. Secretary, the United States in general prepared to do about that?

GEN. CASEY: I have no evidence that there are Iranians in Iraq that are actually directing attacks. They are providing the materiel to Shi'a extremist groups that operate as their surrogates.

SEC. RUMSFELD: I thought you used the word "surrogate" in connection with Lebanon also -- when you were speaking earlier. I thought --

GEN. CASEY: There are some indications that Lebanese Hezbollah is also used in some of the training functions for the Iranians. So, another surrogate.

SEC. RUMSFELD: And Iran's the principal -- (word inaudible) -- then.

GEN. CASEY: But, I mean, you can't -- I can't believe that they're not giving them this equipment to them knowing that it's going to be used against us. Of course they do.

Yeah.

Q Mr. Secretary, under what circumstances would the United States use its missile defense system to try to shoot down a North Korean missile launch?

SEC. RUMSFELD: At the president's direction. And the president would make a decision with respect to the nature of the launch, whether it was threatening to the territory of the United States or not. And then -- likely threat that it would pose.

Q Can I just follow up? What's your level of concern about the potential of this launch?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, it's clear that all the intelligence suggests they've been making preparations for a launch of a missile from the area of Taepodong for some days now. There's a lot we know, and a lot we don't know. So, we'll just have to see.

Yes.

Q Mr. Secretary, General Chiarelli in an interview with the Philadelphia Inquirer talking about the number of Iraqi Syrians that have been killed by American troops, many at checkpoints, said, quote, "In many instances we are our own worst enemy." I'm wondering if you agree with that, and also your reaction to this -- you have murder charges now against four soldiers and against eight Marines, another investigation expected to bring more charges in Haditha. At what point do you say that, you know, the buck stops with you, that you bear some responsibility for the fact we've seen now so many instances of alleged misconduct?

GEN. CASEY: Well, I could say something. What General Chiarelli was talking about was a tactical situation at a checkpoint. The idea that the secretary has got something to do with that, I don't -- I can't see that. He has been working very hard, as was his predecessor, at putting in place the appropriate policies, tools, and procedures to reduce the number of Iraqis that are injured at our checkpoints. And it's a really difficult situation, because our soldiers are challenged with suicide attacks and car bombs running at their checkpoint. And it's a very careful balance. He's cut it in half here over the last six to eight months or so. So we're making -- we're very concerned about the Iraqi citizens, and he's working it very hard.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yeah.

Q But the murder charges, what about the murder charges --

SEC. RUMSFELD: I think -- we said one question per person. You've had a question.

Q You don't want to comment on the murder charges against --

SEC. RUMSFELD: You've had your question.

Yes.

Q Mr. Secretary, there's been a lot made on Capitol Hill about the chemical weapons that were found and may be quite old. But do you have a real concern of these weapons from Saddam's past perhaps having an

impact on U.S. troops who are on the ground in Iraq right now?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Certainly. What's been announced is accurate, that there have been hundreds of canisters or weapons of various types found that either currently have sarin in them or had sarin in them. And sarin's dangerous. And it's dangerous to our forces and it's a concern. So, obviously, to the extent we can locate these and destroy them, it's important that we do so. They are dangerous. And anyone, I'm sure, General Casey or anyone else in that country, would be concerned if they got in the wrong hands. They are weapons of mass destruction. They're harmful to human beings. And they have been found. And they had not been reported by Saddam Hussein as he inaccurately alleged that he had reported all of his weapons. And they are still being found and discovered.

Yes?

Q General Casey, can you say if there's been any change in the status of the 2nd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, based in Schweinfurt, Germany?

GEN. CASEY: I can't. That's an Army decision.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Pam?

Q General, this week the national security adviser for Iraq laid out what they consider to be a withdrawal plan for U.S. forces. They're operating under the assumption that it will be the end of fiscal year -- or the end of 2007. Has that been coordinated with your office or with you? And is it feasible?

GEN. CASEY: I looked at that article. What Dr. Rubaie is talking about is about this provincial Iraqi control process that we have been working on with him for the past year. And we together built a set of criteria to evaluate the threat in the province, to evaluate the readiness of the police forces, to evaluate the readiness of the army forces, and to evaluate the ability of the provincial security apparatus to coordinate their efforts. And since April, the governors actually sit down with our division commanders and they evaluate themselves on that criteria and they make projections on where they're going to be. And so that's what he was talking about. There have been no discussions between any Iraqi authorities and myself that tied that to U.S. troop reductions.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yes?

Q General Casey, I was curious why you chose to highlight with such specificity Iran today. To what extent, what you laid out about Iran, is that growing -- to what extent is Iran's influence now shaping the security picture or becoming a factor in the overall security picture in Iraq that you have to consider?

GEN. CASEY: I mentioned it today, Barbara, because it's one of the four major elements that contributes to the complexity of the security environment in Iraq.

Q Do you now consider it a major element in Iraq's security?

GEN. CASEY: It is. And it is because they are providing weapons, training and equipment to Shi'a insurgents, and that equipment is being used against us and Iraqis.

Q A follow-up question?

SEC. RUMSFELD: No. Excuse me. Right there, the second row.

Q Thank you, Mr. Secretary. When will the United States in Japan deploy the interceptor missiles in

place?

SEC. RUMSFELD: There are no plans for interceptor missiles in Japan. The current locations are in Alaska and Vandenberg. There may be other locations in the future. But there is a radar that is intended ultimately for Japan, but it has not been hooked up. What we have is a developmental initial system that does not have all the pieces in place but has some modest initial capability. And it will be some months before all of the pieces are in place.

Jim?

Q General Casey, understanding that you haven't made your recommendations on troop levels, can you say are you still confident -- do you still feel confident that the level of troops that are there now could come down by the end of the year, or has this complex security situation sort of obscured your vision as to what's possible this year?

GEN. CASEY: I'm confident that we'll be able to continue to take reductions over the course of this year, and yet -- it's -- well, it's the security situation and the progress of the Iraqi security forces. And I think I've mentioned the significant progress that has been made in that regard.

Q But last year you said fairly a substantial number --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Wait a second, wait a second, wait a second, wait a second.

Q Is that still true, fairly substantial?

GEN. CASEY: I think so. It looks over time --

SEC. RUMSFELD: (Let him ?) finish answering.

GEN. CASEY: What we've always said, what we've always said is there would be a gradual reduction over time as the Iraqi security forces assumed a larger and larger role.

SEC. RUMSFELD: And I would add something else that it will very likely not be a steady path down. It could very likely be a drawdown with an increase, if you think about it. Look over the last year. General Casey has on at least three occasions -- for the January elections, the October referendum, the December elections, and more recently for the stand-up of the government -- brought in some additional forces, and -- or delayed letting some people go out or accelerated some other people coming in. And the effect has been that the number has -- right now, I think we have 126,900 or something -- it's come down from a high of 160,000, but it could very well go back up at some point. So it very likely will go down and up and down and up depending on the circumstances and depending on the need.

Q Fairly substantial reductions by this time this year, you said that last year. Is that still the case?

GEN. CASEY: Well, we -- as the secretary just said, we've gone from when the baseline was 138,000; we're down to about 126,000 right now. That's -- 12,000 that's -- whether that's a very substantial amount -- enough, I'll leave to your judgment. But as I said, I think there will be continued gradual reductions here as the Iraqis take on a larger and larger role.

Q Over the next year or two --

GEN. CASEY: It'll run over the course of the next year.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Do you want to have your fifth question or do you want to let someone else ask a question? What'll it be?

Q He'd probably take a fifth question.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Should we vote? (Laughter.) Yeah, I'll bet he would.

Yes?

Q General Casey, has the investigation goes on about the circumstances involving the two soldiers, what has this done to the psyche of our troops on the ground? And what immediate measures are being taken to help ensure this doesn't happen again until all the circumstances come to light?

GEN. CASEY: I'm sure -- I know commanders at every level have already gone back and revisited their procedures and reemphasized the operating procedures that they have in place to ensure that this doesn't happen. And I'm sure we'll be informed further when the investigation is completed. But they -- we routinely go back and do that across the force.

Q Sir --

Q General Casey, could we -- (inaudible word) -- the troop reduction issue. Given all the progress you've laid out in four or five bullets, why were you not able on this trip to make some recommendations for a reduction? And so I'm a little confused about that.

SEC. RUMSFELD: I explained it. He hasn't had a chance to talk to the Iraqi government in detail because the government's brand new, and he needs time to visit with the new minister of Defense, the new minister of Interior, the new prime minister and the security elements of the Cabinet and figure out and craft a joint way forward that both countries are comfortable with.

GEN. CASEY: That's exactly (right ?).

Q (Off mike.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: No, it's simple. It's not complicated. There's no mystery.

Q How long will the 127 -- this is just a follow-up. The 127, should the American public expect that to stay at that range for the foreseeable future?

GEN. CASEY: What's the --

Q The 127,000 who are still in -- who are in Iraq, should the American public expect to see that level constantly constant, even though, you know, it may slide up and down --

GEN. CASEY: What you're going to see as we -- we're starting rotations again, and so we're going to have a double crossover. So it's going to go up during the rotational period.

SEC. RUMSFELD: During the passover, left seat and right seat.

Q Passover seat, right. (Laughter.)

Q It was reported that one in every three --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Who did?

Q Pardon?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Begin your sentence again?

Q I'm sorry. It was reported that one in --

SEC. RUMSFELD: It was reported by whom? The passive voice always worries me.

Q Okay. The passive voice. It was reported earlier this morning by -- (pauses) -- can I get back to you? (Laughter.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: You're terrific! You're terrific!

Q I promise I will tell you who did it after!

SEC. RUMSFELD: Okay, fair enough. (Chuckles.) I love it!

Q But I heard from a reliable source this morning -- (laughter) --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Oh-oh.

Q -- that one in every three soldiers that returns home to America actually suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome. I was wondering, what efforts or what -- what --

SEC. RUMSFELD: No, there are reports about this --

Q Right.

SEC. RUMSFELD: -- and they're --

Q What steps are you taking --

SEC. RUMSFELD: I've talked to Dr. Winkenwerder about it, and each of the services is --

Q Doctor -- ?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Dr. Winkenwerder is the assistant secretary of Defense, under David Chu, for all medical-related things. And he is working with all of the services. And he can give a very comprehensive briefing on precisely what the facts are and what each of the services is doing in that regard.

And I suppose to answer your question by characterizing what he has told us, and what I believe, is that there has never in history been as comprehensive an effort to address those issues by the services with individuals when they return, and while they're there.

GEN. CASEY: And I can also tell you we have a very active Combat Stress Program in theater, and we have an assessment team we bring over annually to check on the mental health and how we're doing on that. But it's something we treat in theater as well.

SEC. RUMSFELD: And you do not need to get back to me! (Laughs; laughter.)

Tom?

Q Mr. Secretary, given General Casey's concern about the Iranians, has the U.S. government communicated its concern to the Iranian government through some diplomatic channels?

SEC. RUMSFELD: You'd have to ask the State Department, but -- precisely what they've done in that regard. But I think it's safe to assume that given General Casey's concern, General Abizaid's concern, and my concern, that -- I hate to speak for them, but -- (pauses) -- I guess I shouldn't speak for them. I'll leave it for them. But clearly, I've said so publicly, General Casey said so publicly. They're not in the dark about the extent to which we're aware of what they're doing, which is notably unhelpful and causing the death of Americans.

Q Has it increased, Mr. Secretary?

SEC. RUMSFELD: General?

GEN. CASEY: Since January, we have seen an upsurge in their support, particularly to the Shi'a extremist groups.

SEC. RUMSFELD: I think we better make this the last question. Behind you, Pam.

Q General, staying on the same topic, it's sometimes difficult to sense who is pulling the strings when it comes to Iran. Are we talking about the Iranian central government pulling strings on things going on in Iraq? Are we talking about Revolutionary Guard elements? Can you elaborate a bit more who you think in Iran is actually directing this stuff?

Q And who they're helping.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Do you think there are rogue elements milling around Iran?

GEN. CASEY: It is a very complicated country. What we see, though, is their Qods Force, their special -- covert special operations forces, are the ones that are directing this. Now, you would assume that they're not doing that independently, that there is some central direction from somebody in Tehran.

Q Is the aid primarily to Sadr's forces, or is it spread between Sadr, Badr, the people in Maysan?

GEN. CASEY: We think they're supporting all of the -- not all of the groups, but a wide variety of groups across southern Iraq.

SEC. RUMSFELD: We'll make this the last question. Right here.

Q This is a good one.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Oops, oops. You've had one. You've had one. (Laughter.)

Q No, this is a good one. Actually, I have a follow-up.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Are you saying his is a bad question? (Laughter.)

Q Well let me hear it first.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yeah, let's hear it! (Laughter.) We'll vote, we'll decide what we think.

Q General Casey, could you just talk to -- are you going to deploy a force back to Kuwait, a ready force, to replace the one that left a couple of months ago? General Ham said that there's always going to be that capability for commanders in Iraq --

GEN. CASEY: I haven't deployed the full force out of Kuwait. I still have Headquarters and about 1,400 -- there's about 1,400 folks in Kuwait I can still call on, plus I have a MEU that's available to me there.

Q Are you going to supplement them or expand -- I mean, deploy new people?

GEN. CASEY: The MEU is the reconstitution there. And these other ones are not going to stay up in Iraq permanently.

They'll rotate back as their tasks are finished.

SEC. RUMSFELD: But rather than tying it to a specific force or a specific location -- Kuwait, Germany or the U.S. -- we do like the idea that General Casey feels comfortable having some forces on a relatively short tether at some location where they could moved in in a timely manner to provide the kind of assistance that he feels the circumstances on the ground might call for. And their location could be anywhere. It could be here, could be Germany, could be there. And I would think -- don't you agree? -- that you wouldn't want to tie it to a specific place --

GEN. CASEY: Sure.

SEC. RUMSFELD: -- over a period of time.

We know that there was a call forward element in Kuwait, and that's happened to be where they are now, but at some point that'll phase out and something else will phase in.

Q And as the top military commander in Iraq, what is your opinion about a specific, set timetable for withdrawal of American forces from Iraq?

GEN. CASEY: I don't like it. I feel it would limit my flexibility. I think it would give the enemy a fixed timetable, and I think it would send a terrible signal to a new government of national unity in Iraq that's trying to stand up and get its legs underneath it.

Q How much of an increase --

Q One question on North Korea --

Q Point of procedure, sir? I have a point of procedure. I don't think you can adjourn when there's a point of procedure on the table. (Laughter.)

Q General Casey, how much of an increase by Iran, since you mentioned increase since January? Can you -- so we don't go away with any misperceptions out of this room, and we have accuracy, sir -- (laughter) -- how much of an increase have you seen since January?

GEN. CASEY: It's difficult to quantify, to say there's a been 10, 20, 30, 40 percent increase. But we are

seeing the explosively formed projectile attacks against us increase. Those primarily come from Iran. We're seeing attacks, and we're finding more of them, so it's coming in from, we believe, Iran.

Q An increase -- a marked increase in --

Q Would you describe it, sir, as continuing? It just hasn't let up?

GEN. CASEY: I think it's continuing. I think it is a noticeable increase since January.

Q General, did you say --

Q (Inaudible) -- from Iran?

GEN. CASEY: No --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Tori always had this place under reasonable control. (Laughter.) I don't understand what's happened.

Q Sir, one question.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Last question.

Q Give an Irishman a break. One question on North Korea.

The South Korean defense minister --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Tell the world your name.

Q (Laughs.) They know my name.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Let's hear it. Let's hear it, though.

Q You want to pronounce it for me?

SEC. RUMSELD: No. (Laughter.)

Q (Inaudible.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: See, he's Irish.

Q (Inaudible.)

Q The South Korean Defense minister today said that he did not think a missile test was imminent. He said the North Koreans would have to go through a number of --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Who said this?

Q The South Korean Defense minister, Yoon. He said they would have to go through a series of processes before they could actually launch a missile. Do you think it's imminent? Do you believe they've fueled the rockets?

SEC. RUMSFELD: We don't need to guess. We don't know their procedures perfectly. They have not fired these, I don't believe, since 1998, the last time they fired one of the Taepondong.

Q But they need fuel, regardless.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Of course they do. And I'm not going to get into precisely what we believe the steps to be. We have theories and we get briefed on them, and the South Korean Defense minister is obviously right, you do have to go through a series of steps. The question is, at what stage are they in those steps? And I don't intend to get into it.

Q (Off mike) -- not imminent.

SEC. RUMSFELD: I do not agree with him, I do not disagree with him. I'm not commenting on what he said. (Laughter.)

Thank you, folks.

Q Thank you for coming. Come back and see us. You're always welcome.

Q/SEC. RUMSFELD (?): Come see me.

Q General Casey, are you being extended?

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