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Presenter: Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld

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DoD News Briefing

(Also participating; Gen. Peter Pace, Vice Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff)

SEC. RUMSFELD: Hello, folks. Good afternoon.

For some time now, there have been those who, understandably, questioned whether the people of Iraq were ready or even willing to embrace the ideals of liberty, of freedom, the ideals that millions of others have fought for and died for over past centuries. Last Sunday the Iraqi people answered those questions, and they answered them in a resounding way.

Think of how these Iraqis must have felt when they went out, sometimes tentatively, stood around the polling places, waited to see if anyone else was going to vote; and what they saw eventually was everyone else voting. They had lived in a system where they were taught for years never to express their views or they'd be putting themselves at risk. And yet they saw everyone around them felt the same way they did. It must have made the liberation of those people feel real. It had to make them feel more hopeful for the future. That has to cause a tipping of support for the government, whoever is elected, because of the confidence that all of those people have to feel as a result of seeing so many others of the same view.

And it sent a strong message to the extremists, one would think. One Iraqi voter said, "This is the only way available for me to fight the terrorists." Another Iraqi was asked in an interview to discount the importance of just this one election. He replied, "I'm a scientist. I've worked with experiments, and usually the first experiment is the hardest."

On Sunday, millions of Iraqis cast their vote for freedom, and we and other countries must surely understand that we must not abandon them now. Theirs was a truly historic accomplishment. As the president noted in his State of the Union address last evening, a free nation now sits in the heart of one of the world's most violent regions, and it is in everyone's interest to see that freedom takes root.

The president noted that the coalition's involvement in Iraq has now entered a new phase, one of partnership, of assisting the Iraqis in defending their country rather than Iraqis assisting the coalition. This means very simply that some members of our coalition will be assisting Iraq in new

ways and might join in helping train and equip Iraqi security forces or provide assistance to Iraqi ministries.

In this new phase, the priority will be on increasing our efforts to help the Iraqis assume more responsibility for providing security for their country. It is the Iraqi people, not the coalition, who over time will defeat the insurgents. And they have shown that they have the heart to do that. The number of Iraqi security personnel who have died defending their country tells without question that they have the courage to do so.

When people talk about Iraqi security forces, everyone wants to talk about numbers. What also matters, of course, is capability. Capability is a function partly of numbers, but also of training, equipment, and it's a function of leadership and experience. No one should expect that Iraqi security forces are going to come out of some pipeline, training program, and become instantaneously battle-hardened veterans like the fine men and women of the U.S. military. Most of these people will not have had deployments or a lot of experience. Nor are they necessarily accustomed to the relatively new chain of command.

Perhaps the most important thing to come from last Sunday's election is a better understanding of America and its role in the world. The U.S. and our coalition partners have brought freedom to 50 million people in Iraq and Afghanistan. What is happening in Afghanistan and Iraq will one day be seen as historic victories for the war against extremism.

As George Washington noted, liberty, when it begins to take root, is a plant of rapid growth. But none of these achievements would have been possible were it not for the courage and bravery of America's men and women in uniform and the sacrifices they have made for freedom.

And if I may, I want to say a personal word to all those who have lost a son or a daughter or a parent or a friend during conflict in Iraq or elsewhere in the global war against extremists, and also to all those who have been wounded and to their loved ones as well. The sacrifices that you and your loved ones have made have historic meaning. We are already seeing the importance of those contributions. You have helped to bring a new beginning to those in some of the most violent regions of the world. You have helped them turn away from extremism that fuels attacks on civilized people. And one day the people of Afghanistan and the people of Iraq will find a way to say thank you, as I do. And each of you and your loved ones will look back with pride at what has been achieved because of those sacrifices. Ours is a safer world and a better world because of the service of the men and women in uniform.

General Pace?

GEN. PACE: Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

In my time as vice chairman, there have been some very, very special days. One was Election Day in Afghanistan. Another was this past Sunday's Election Day in Iraq. Another was last night during the State of the Union address when the woman from Iraq whose father had been killed by Saddam Hussein turned around and put her arms around the mother of a fallen U.S. soldier. It gives me immense pride to stand here in uniform to represent the hundreds of thousands of U.S. service men and women who are serving today, who can take pride in our part in facilitating the opportunity for the millions of people in Afghanistan and Iraq to vote.

Along with the secretary, I would like to thank all those who are in uniform who are serving

and are sacrificing. And most importantly to their families and to their employers for allowing us to do our job in this war so that people around the world can live free and pick their own form of government.

With that, we'll take your questions.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Charlie?

Q Mr. Secretary, you said that no one should expect Iraqi security forces I believe to come out of a pipeline like the fine battle-hardened men and women of the U.S. military.

I'd like to ask, if I could, your reaction and the reaction of Marine General Pace, to some comments, apparently intemperate comments that General James Mattis made this week at a meeting in San Francisco -- San Diego, he made publicly in San Diego. He said -- he was asked about fighting terrorists and insurgents and he said, "Actually, it's quite fun to fight them, you know. It's a hell of a hoot. It's fun to shoot some people, I'll be right up front with you. I like brawling."

Mattis also said, "You go into Afghanistan, you've got guys who slap women around for five years because they didn't wear a veil. You know, guys like that ain't got no manhood left anyway, so it's a hell of a lot of fun to shoot them."

The commandant of the Marine Corps, General Hagee, says he's counseled General Mattis on those comments. I'd like to have you all's reaction to those public comments, if I could.

SEC. RUMSFELD: General Pace?

GEN. PACE: Charlie, first of all, all of us who are leaders have a responsibility in our words, in our actions, to provide the right example all the time for those who look to us for leadership.

I was not present when General Mattis made those specific comments, so I would let him address what he said for himself.

But I will tell you that the last three times that that general has been in combat, when he was leading Marines in Afghanistan, and the two times that he led his division in Iraq, his actions, and those of his troops, clearly show that he understands the value of proper leadership and the value of human life.

And in fact, if you go back and re-read, as I did this morning, the letter that he published to all of his troops in March of 2003 before the 1st Marine Division attacked into Iraq, you will see in one piece of paper, in several very short paragraphs, a leader who is directing his troops to fight the enemy with overwhelming power and to show great compassion to those who are noncombatants. So clearly in his writing and clearly in the way that his troops have acted in combat, he has set the example. I will leave it to him to tell you what he meant to say when he said what he said.

Q General, I don't think anyone would argue about both his sensitivity and his bravery, but Mr. Secretary, do you think the commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps Development Command should be saying publicly that it's fun to shoot people?

SEN. RUMSFELD: I have not read his words. I don't know what he said precisely or the context. And I understand that General Pace has, and he's responded.

Bob.

Q Mr. Secretary, in your opening remarks, you mentioned that you would expect that the election, having been successful, would have some effect on the insurgency. I'm wondering if you could elaborate on that in terms of, are you saying it may take some of the steam out of the insurgency?

SEC. RUMSFELD: No, I think -- as I watched it, and it was a moving experience for me, I doubt that one can say that that election would necessarily change the people like Zarqawi and the terrorists and the jihadists, the extremists who chop people's heads off. That election may be a transforming event for others, but not for people like that. So I expect that level of violence and the insurgency to continue.

I do think there's something important about people going out and -- think of these people. Thirty-five years, they've lived in a repressive dictatorial system, where anyone who raised their head got shot or got thrown in the jail. And there was no premium or reward for being brave or for sticking your head up or for arguing or disagreeing or showing your own feelings. It imposed a conformity on that society. And you worry over time what that does to people's courage. And yet there they were. They went out. Some of them walked around the polling place, didn't go in to vote. Finally some 70-year-old woman walked in, and everyone followed.

When they see that, they simply must take heart from that, take courage from that and begin to feel, "Well, everyone else thinks the way I do. I want to vote. And they want to vote. And it's our country." And at some point, the only people who can make Iraq work for the Iraqi people are the Iraqi people. It can't be us or the coalition. And when they saw that, it strikes me that -- there's a couple of picture here. Let me just show you one.

Here's an Iraqi security force outside of a polling place. And these statements you've read about the Iraqi security forces not being capable or there aren't any of them, there's -- I got the correct number today from General Petraeus -- there's 136,000 Iraqi security forces. And they provided the first ring and the second ring around every polling place, and there were 5,000 polling places. So the people who say there's only 4,000 Iraqi security forces, they must have done a whale of a job if they covered 5,000 polling places and had two rings around. That is a big thing.

Here's a -- their first police mechanized battalion that -- when it went by, people were cheering.

And here is what happened at one of the recruiting areas the day after the election. People just poured in to sign up to become part of the Iraqi security forces. Now, something's going on in that country that's good.

Q Are you saying they've become less tolerant of the insurgency --

SEC. RUMSFELD: I think that in these types of situations, at some point a tipping takes place. If you think of -- everyone doesn't agree with everybody. There will be people who will be pro-insurgency and extremist; there will be people in that group that are Ba'athists and want to reestablish Saddam Hussein's regime, that type of regime. Then there will be people very positive in favor of the Iraqi interim government. And in between there are people who are waiting to see

what's going to happen. And they feel this way, but they don't want their families to be killed. I mean, on the walls of the streets, it said "you vote, you die," and people had to make a conscious decision. I mean, when you join the Iraqi security forces, your family's at risk. And yet there they are, joining up.

Now what does that mean? I think that it means that intelligence is going to improve. I think that it means that there will be more people who will be willing to provide information to the Iraqi security forces and the coalition forces about people who were trying to intimidate them and control their cities. And I think that over time, as they move towards the transitional constituent assembly and they pick a president in the period ahead and then two deputy presidents and then a prime minister and then new ministers -- or the same ministers; whatever the case may be -- and then they start fashioning a constitution, I mean, all of that builds on what went before.

And I think that -- I mean, you think of the difficulties in Afghanistan. And here they are, they've gone -- take the Bonn process, they've had their loya jirga, they elected a president, they have a constitution, they're going to have parliamentary elections in April or May or sometime in that period, as I recall -- that becomes reinforcing over time. And it takes a lot of courage, if you've lived in that type of a society where people -- tens of thousands of people fill up those mass graves for disagreeing with the government, when that is the case and you suddenly say you're going to put your confidence in a piece of paper, a constitution, and it will be that that will protect you and your family from being imposed on by the other elements in that society, that is a big roll of the dice. I mean, in that part of the world, AK-47s are good protection. There's not a long history of a piece of paper being good protection, and that's where they're going; that's the direction they're going.

So I think that over time we've seen an act last Sunday that gave great courage to the Iraqi people. The courage was there, but they had to go out and see that the other people had that courage. And that's going to have an effect.

Q Mr. Secretary?

Q Mr. Secretary, the reality, though, is that even though the first and second rings were guarded by brave Iraqi security forces, they were backed up stiffened by 150,000 U.S. troops armed to the teeth and ready to provide Quick Reaction Teams for everybody.

What are some of the training and equipment benchmarks you're going to be watching for in the next year to give you a realistic assessment of when they can do operations on their own without being backed up by a massive U.S. force?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, they're already doing operations. There are elements of the Iraqi security forces that are able today to operate independently and they've done it. There have been any number of instances where they've been successful. And what's going to happen is the soft or more difficult things are where the effort is going to have to be. How do you strengthen the ministry so that there's confidence in there? How do you assure that the chain of command is going to be effective? How do you link the Ministry of Interior security forces with the Ministry of Defense security forces? How do you fashion an intelligence apparatus so that when people do want to provide more information and they are willing to provide it that it can move effectively up that chain and decisions can be made? These are qualitative things as opposed to quantity.

And the other thing that happens is time. The longer they're there, the longer a person is in the army or in one of these special police battalions, they get better at it. I mean, it's like all of us;

the more you do something, the better you get at it.

Q Well, the American people then should be steeled for the fact that U.S. troops are going to be there for a while then, because what you've described are very intangible ways to measure progress.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Look, we are making very good progress with the Iraqi security forces. We know where we are. We started over here with zero and we've gone up to a point where 136,000 today, heading towards 200,000 in October of this year when the constitution is voted on, and a projection going up. Now, will it happen exactly that way? I don't know. We've had how many assessment teams go in? I think four. We had the original with the CPA, then we had a second one, then General Eikenberry went in, and then, six months later, General Casey went in and had to make a new assessment. And then we just had Gary Luck do it. We'll probably do another one in another six months because the circumstance on the ground changes.

But we're making very good progress with the Iraqi security forces and they're showing real courage.

Q Mr. Secretary?

Q Mr. Secretary, have you decided whether you're going to attend the prestigious Munich conference on security policy next week? And is that decision hinging at all on the fact that a German federal prosecutor is entertaining allegations that you and other U.S. officials are war criminals?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I have not made a final decision on that, and there are several factors. I'm going to be in Nice and I'm very likely going to visit some other locations in the part of the world during that period. And whether I end up there, we'll soon know. It will be a week, and we'll find out.

Q Well, what about the -- are you concerned at all about the universal jurisdiction that Germany has and the fact that --

SEC. RUMSFELD: It's -- it's certainly an issue, as it was in Belgium. It's something that we have to take into consideration.

Q Mr. Secretary, today the Iraqi Interior minister said that his forces had two to three times in recent weeks, quote, "missed Zarqawi by one hour. We will get him very soon, hopefully." Can you shed any light on the hunt for Zarqawi and the recent operations to try to track him down?

GEN. PACE: I would simply say to you that just like we did Saddam Hussein, we are now working very closely with the Iraqi government on the hunt for Zarqawi. Nobody knows how many times we passed close to Saddam Hussein before we found him. Nobody knows how many times we may have passed or not passed close to Zarqawi. We continue to focus our efforts, intel collection-wise, sharing intel with the Iraqi government; our special operators, their special operators working very hard, collaboratively to get Zarqawi. I do not know when it will happen, but I can tell you we will continue to chase him with the same vigor we did Saddam Hussein.

Q Mr. Secretary?

Q Mr. Secretary, if I could clarify one thing, sir. You said that 136,000. How many of those are equipped and trained to the level you would want to see before U.S. troops could withdrawal -- withdraw, rather?

GEN. PACE: Of the 136,000, about 56,000 are in the military forces. The other 80,000 are in the police forces. Each of those is in units that have been properly equipped with personnel uniforms, pistols, rifles, helmets, flak jackets, communications equipment, vehicles and the like. So the equipping part is complete for those 136,000.

The training part, which gets to the question about how successful are you being, is a(n) iterative process. And they first train up in squads of about 12 or 13 soldiers; then they go to platoons of about 39 to 50, depending on the unit; then they go to companies of about 150; and then to battalions of about 800.

We have seen over the last six months or so that initially, when the battalions went to the field, they did not perform as well as we had hoped they would. They came back in, we did a lessons learned with them, did more training and put them back in the field. There are now some 74 battalions, when you add all the police battalions and all the Iraqi army battalions that are part of that 136,000 who are trained and equipped. And of those 74 battalions, many were in the field during the elections, operating successfully as battalions. And in fact, one brigade of three battalions operated successfully in and around the Fallujah area.

So we are watching over time the units that are able to operate independently grow from squad and platoon up to battalion and brigade, and we work side by side with them because it is important. Just like it's important for our Marines and soldiers to have fire support from the air and artillery and the like, it's important for the Iraqis. And that's why we work with them, because we're able to provide some of the things that they don't have yet.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Just so you follow where this sequence is going, when we first started with zero, they started then reporting the people on duty, and that number got quite high because it included 74,000 site protection people that are not part of the Ministry of Defense or the Ministry of Interior. At a certain point we got better visibility into the numbers and began counting just the trained people, and that then caused a drop-off in what we were reporting, and we announced that. So now we're talking about those that are trained at the appropriate level, not equipped yet. Then we said, okay, now we've got visibility into their equipment, and what we're going to do is take out the 74,000 site protection people, and we now know we're going to take out anyone who wasn't properly equipped. And the numbers you received today, the 136,000, are people who have been trained at the appropriate level and have been equipped at the appropriate level that are in the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior and do not include another 74,000 site protection people who are not part of either of those ministries.

Q May I ask --

Q The question, then, Mr. Secretary --

Q How many trained and equipped would it take to see major U.S. troops start coming home?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Sure, fine. The answer to that is it depends on the conditions on the ground. If the level of the insurgency declined to zero, it would take no U.S. If it increased and doubled, it would take U.S. So the -- there's no simple, neat answer to your question because

there are variables at work there, understandably, and the goal is to have a secure environment, and the goal is to have the Iraqis provide the secure environment, not us and not the coalition, and that's the path we're on. And as more and more Iraqi people feel they have a stake in that country -- and they will, as they vote, in my -- I have no doubt in my mind but that that's the case -- and as they are more supportive of the Interim Iraqi Government, and as the numbers of Iraqi security forces increase, obviously there'll be less of a need for coalition forces.

Q Can I ask a clarification, please, sir?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Go ahead. Yeah.

Q Yes. More specifically, you use the 136,000 number, and you yourself acknowledged that there's been a dispute -- some members of Congress claim that number's much lower. But today --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Fact's are facts.

Q Right. But the --

SEC. RUMSFELD: I mean, anyone can say anything they want, but facts are facts. And this is what -- I spent an hour this morning with Petraeus going every -- over every one of these numbers, and General Casey.

Q But this morning before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Joint Chief Chairman General Myers said that Lieutenant General Petraeus has about 136,000. There are some 40,000 who are considered deployable, totally combat-capable, to -- according to General Myers, could go anywhere and do anything. And then, Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz said that there is, in fact, among the armed forces a 40 percent absentee rate. So it would seem to me that -- well, let me ask you --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Sure.

Q -- don't you think that that -- using that 136,000 number consistently, wouldn't that be a little misleading as to the capabilities of those forces?

SEC. RUMSFELD: A number does not give you capability. It gives you numbers. I said that in my opening comments here. And it can't be misleading, because I've just said exactly what you've just said.

Q But just in --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Just -- let me finish. Let me finish. Numbers are numbers. Capability and capacity to do things are something other than that. And as I pointed out, they depend on experience, they depend on leadership, they depend on intelligence.

Now, there are some other things -- and I wasn't there to hear the testimony you're talking about. But the fact of the matter is that the other things that go -- first of all, the policeman is local. He doesn't need the mobility that a special police -- what do they call them. Special police battalion, I think they call them -- needs to move from one place to another rapidly. And that affects capability. It does -- mobility does not affect capability for a policeman who's walking a local beat, if you will. So it -- the requirements for a border patrol, for example. That may be

because they're moving along the border, and they may be a fixed spot at a point. But you do have to look at numbers, you do have to look at capabilities and quality. You do have to look at, in the cases of those that need mobility, whether they have the mobility. And those that do not live at home, they require sustainability. And of course that's -- in our case we would talk about combat support, combat service support and the kinds of things that permit sustainment.

So it is flat wrong to say that anyone is misleading anyone; because they are not. And what is happening is we are providing the best data anyone has in the world to the Congress on a regular basis every week -- or every two weeks, I forget -- on a classified basis. There's an unclassified version of it.

It is perfectly possible for anyone to try to take the data and make something else out of it, but you don't expect a policeman to be operating in a helicopter, for example, whereas you may expect a special commando squad that's task is counterterrorism to have to have that kind of mobility.

And it varies throughout this. We're talking about six or eight or 10 different types of security forces.

I've got the Bulgarian minister of Defense arriving in, I think, five minutes. And I'm going to have to excuse myself. But --

Q Mr. Secretary, can you comment on the decision to choose a Lockheed Martin Italian-Anglo helicopter --

SEC. RUMSFELD: I can't. It was a Department of the Navy decision, and Secretary --

Q Did you speak with the Italian Defense minister about this when he was visiting?

SEC. RUMSFELD: It never came up.

Q Thank you.

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