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DoD News Briefing

SEC. RUMSFELD: Good afternoon, folks. One week from today Americans will celebrate the 229th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence that launched our war of liberation. It's easy to forget that those early patriots faced monumental difficulties as they sought to overcome an array of failures and obstacles. But they had the vision and the courage to persevere and establish the first enduring democracy the world had then known.

The people of Iraq today are in the earliest days of their struggle to build a multiethnic democracy. Ultimately, it will be up to the Iraqi people -- not the United States, not the coalition -- to rebuild and secure their country. The mission of our coalition is to create an environment, where the Iraqis themselves can contain and ultimately defeat their insurgency.

Despite their long-neglected infrastructure and their lack of experience with democracy, the Iraqi people have demonstrated both the will and the capacity to succeed. They have oil, water, intelligent people, well-educated people, and a heritage of a great civilization that can be put to work to build a moderate Iraq version of a self-governing society.

The suggestion of those who say we are losing, or that we're in a quagmire, seems to be that, as long as there's violence in Iraq, that the conclusion must be that insurgents are winning. Not so.

Consider the changes of the past year. A democratically elected government is in place, and more than 8 million Iraqis went to the polls, defying intimidation at home and skepticism here in the United States, in their region and abroad. The Sunni minority now has belatedly recognize that boycotting their election was a mistake. And they are rejoining the political process.

Insurgents remain capable of savage attacks, to be sure. But they can no longer take advantage of sanctuaries like Fallujah to train, plan and hold hostages.

Iraq's security forces have grown steadily in size and capability. They have equipment and experience they previously lacked, and are earning the confidence and support of the Iraqi people.

Conversely, the violent extremists have had little to show for their efforts, except for a growing body count of mostly Iraqi civilians, and a skillful knack for grabbing headlines -- free publicity worth millions to their

violent cause. But despite their public affairs skills, they are not a nationalist movement, they don't have a vision, and they will eventually lose.

In his meeting with President Bush on Friday, Iraq's new prime minister thanked the American people for their patience and for their resolve. The Iraqi leaders recognize that there's more work to be done and that the work is theirs to do. Their tasks include: ensuring that there are no delays in drafting or voting on the new Iraqi constitution, strengthening the Iraqi ministries to improve their ability to provide needed services and to reduce coalition involvement, aggressively encouraging their neighbors to close their neighbors to terrorists, persuading Iraq's Sunnis to reject the insurgency and embrace the political process, and to work closely with their coalition allies to turn responsibility for more cities and provinces over to Iraqi security forces.

Success for the coalition should not be defined as domestic tranquility in Iraq. Other democracies have had to contend with terrorism and insurgencies for a number of years, but they've been able to function and eventually succeed. As in difficult conflicts of the past, lasting progress and achievements do not come from reacting to headlines or chasing mercurial opinion polls. Setbacks are inevitable, and important victories are seldom won without risk, sacrifice and patience.

Recently, the mood and commitment of the American people towards the efforts in Iraq have been the subject of discussion. Our American system places all of our faith and all of our hope in the people of our country, and the confidence that, given sufficient information, over time that they'll find their way to the right decisions. I believe they will do so on Iraq. And I also believe that one day, those that have worked so hard and sacrificed so much -- Americans, our coalition partners, and Iraqis alike -- will look back with pride at what will then be seen as an historic accomplishment.

With me today is General George Casey, commanding general of the Multinational Force in Iraq. We're fortunate to have men like General Casey and General Abizaid leading our superb men and women in uniform in what is clearly a difficult, but critically important effort.

General Casey.

GEN. CASEY: Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

As we approach tomorrow's one-year anniversary of sovereignty in Iraq, I continue to be inspired by the Iraqi people's courage and perseverance as they fight to build a better future for themselves and for their families.

In the past year, the Iraqis, supported by the coalition, have established an interim government, neutralized a Shi'a insurgency, eliminated terrorist and insurgent safe havens across Iraq, mobilized their security forces to confront the insurgency, increased the pace of economic development, conducted the first truly democratic elections in Iraq in decades, seated a democratically elected National Assembly, and peacefully passed control to the transitional government. The new government has formed and aggressively continues the campaign against terrorists and insurgents, while building inclusive political, governmental and constitutional processes.

The Iraqi people make progress every day. They are serious about their future. They are serious about building a government that respects the human rights of all Iraqis. And they are serious about defeating the terrorists and insurgents, who are doing their utmost to derail their dreams.

Now, we hear a lot about violence in Iraq, so I thought it might be useful to consider what the insurgents and terrorists have not done in the past year. They have not been able to expand their support base across Iraq, nor have they attracted a broad following, largely because they offer no positive vision for the future of

Iraq. They have not prevented the growth of Iraqi security forces, even with almost daily attacks. They have lost their safe haven in Fallujah, and they have not been able to reconstitute another one. They have also not sparked sectarian violence, although they work at it every day, so strong is the Iraqi commitment to something better. Lastly and perhaps most importantly, they have not stopped political and economic development in Iraq.

Iraq slowly gets better every day. Recent polls confirm that Iraqis are confident in their government and their security forces, are optimistic about the future, and intend to vote in large numbers in the upcoming constitutional referendum in December elections. We are well-positioned for continued success in Iraq. But we should be clear: there are long-term developmental challenges and much to be done. And Iraq's steady progress will be contested.

To be sure, the terrorists and insurgents are out to shake our will. But they will not succeed. The Iraqi people, enabled by the military and civilian members of the coalition, will succeed.

Now, if I might, a word to the families of the men and women of our armed forces in the coalition serving in Iraq. First, I could not be prouder of these magnificent men and women. It seems that every generation of Americans gets dealt a tough challenge to keep our country secure. Every American can be proud of the tremendous job these soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines are doing in Iraq in perhaps the most challenging and demanding environment imaginable. They deserve our praise and our continued support.

Finally, I've been on the ground a year now. And as I look back over the past year and look ahead to the next election, I am more convinced than ever that our mission there is both realistic and achievable. It will require patience and will, but both the region and the United States will be more secure when Iraq succeeds.

Thank you.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Charlie.

Q Gentlemen, I'd like to ask, General Abizaid said before Congress last week that the number of foreign fighters, who are the suicide combers and the real mass killers, the number coming into Iraq is increasing. General Casey, can you and will you put enough U.S. troops along that border to try and seal it off? And Mr. Secretary, is the United States going to finally force Syria's hand here by telling them that if they don't shut it off on their side, that that border will then be open to defensive movement by American troops?

SEC. RUMSFELD: (To General Casey.) You take the first one, the first piece of that.

First of all, I think you've seen that we have already, with Iraqi security forces and Iraqi border forces, begun operations in the northwest to begin to disrupt the flow of foreign fighters and terrorists across that border from Syria. That's been going on for a period of time here. I think you've going to see that over time around the rest of the country.

But let's be clear, you talk about sealing borders. We can't even seal our own border here in the United States, all right. So there's -- what we can do is make it very, very difficult for the foreign fighters and terrorists to come across into Iraq, and we're in the process of doing that right now.

Q Mr. Secretary?

SEC. RUMSFELD: The Iraqi government has a neighbor called Syria, and Iraq is a big country. It's a wealthy country. It can be a powerful country over time. And they're going to be Syria's neighbor for a long time. It seems to me it's up to Syria's neighbors, including Iraq, to interact with Syria in a way that helps them understand the damage they're doing to the region from an economic standpoint, from a political standpoint and

from a security standpoint.

And certainly, the president and our government has been involved in that process with them.

Q Mr. Secretary --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yes.

Q I'm sorry. Briefly, it's American troops, including these troops in Fallujah last week, who are being killed by the --

SEC. RUMSFELD: I said the United States has been involved with them.

Q Well, you have been involved repeatedly for a long time. Are you finally going to tell Syria that it's either/or -- either you shut this off or we come after these people across the border?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Those are decisions -- those are decisions that aren't made in the Department of Defense, as you know.

Q Okay --

Q Mr. Secretary, back during the Vietnam War, the general in charge of the forces in North Vietnam, Defense Minister General Giap, once said that they have patience; Americans do not have patience.

You give a good message here, as does General Casey and other of the military brass, and yet, there are attacks now, almost hourly. We're briefed by generals here who say that they are increasing, they are using new weapons -- (inaudible) -- charges, and there is no lack, apparently, of people willing to give their lives for the jihad. How do you intend to convince the American people to continue having patience with this loss of life that goes on continuously?

SEC. RUMSFELD: It seems to me that it's important to understand that since September 11th, we've been engaged in a struggle, a -- some call it a war. It is a war in many respects. It's also a struggle within a religion, and it is a difficult one. There are violent extremists that are determined to topple governments in various parts of the world and to -- and many of them hoping to re-establish a caliphate, and their weapon of choice is terrorism. And those people are engaged in violent, extremist acts. They were on September 11th in this country; they have been in dozens of other countries. And what's taking place in Iraq is a part of this global struggle between moderate Muslims and between extremists -- violent extremists. It is hard, I understand, for people to connect all of the pieces, but the reality is we're an awful lot better off fighting against the extremists and the terrorists in other parts of the world than having to do it here at home.

And anyone who thinks about this understands that if you go into a defensive mode and simply think you can play defense against a terrorist that has the enormous advantage of being able to attack at any time, at any place, using any technique, and particularly if you're willing to give up your own life -- you can't defend in every place against every technique at every moment of the day or night. And therefore, you have no choice but to be on the offense against these people, and that is in fact what's taking place in Iraq. And I don't doubt for a minute but that the American people remember September 11th well, and that they understand that what's taking place is a global struggle against people who are determined to destroy our way of life, as they've announced and indicated -- and publicly indicated.

Q General Casey?

GEN. CASEY: I'm sorry, if I could -- just a piece of that. And I've encountered this in several different forms. But there appears to be a perception that today, and in fact, over the last two months, that the violence is out of control, that it far exceeds any levels that we've seen before. That's just not the case. In fact, over the last seven weeks, we've ranged between 450 and 500 attacks over the course of a week. In August in Najaf, in November around Ramadan in Fallujah, and then for the elections there were 700, 800, 900 attacks over the course of a week. What you're seeing different is the car-bomb attacks and the suicide car-bomb attacks against innocent civilians. It's strictly a weapon of terror.

The second point that I'd just make here is that the people that are conducting these attacks, by even our most pessimistic estimates of the insurgency, are less than one-tenth of one percent of the population of Iraq, supported by foreign fighters. So you have a very, very small portion of the population trying to stop the rest of the Iraqi population from achieving their goals.

Q General?

Q General Casey, what's your view of statements like the one Senator Kennedy made, that seem to suggest that the United States has already lost in Iraq and should pull out as quickly as possible to avoid any unnecessary further American casualties? And what effect do statements like that have on the troops and the difficulty of the job they have to do?

GEN. CASEY: I think I responded to Senator Kennedy's comment about quagmired at the hearing. Obviously, I don't agree with the statement that the United States is losing in Iraq nor that we are getting into a quagmire.

I'm sorry, second part?

Q What impact do such statements have on the troops --

GEN. CASEY: Thank you.

Q -- and the difficulty of the job they have to do?

GEN. CASEY: Yeah. I went around to visit all the division commanders just prior to coming back and asked them, one, how's the situation, how are things going? And to a person, they all responded that this is moving in the right direction in their areas. Then I asked them did they have enough troops to do what they needed to do. And to a person, they all said they had what they needed to get the job done.

So, we're kind of scratching our heads, and the troops are kind of scratching their heads, wondering why there's such a large disconnect between what they are seeing on the ground every day and statements like that back here, because they're just not connected.

Q General Casey, can you comment --

Q General Casey, when you talk about, in particular the number of attacks -- and you've talked about this over the weekend and Friday as well -- and again, you compare it to August in Najaf or Fallujah in November when the attacks were different, those were -- we were engaged in combat, particularly in Fallujah. It seems you can take these numbers of attacks and compare it in many different ways. And we may compare it to two months ago when it's high.

So tell us this; what do you look at when you look for a secure Iraq?

And as you say, Secretary Rumsfeld, you can't look for complete tranquility.

But what is the measure of success in bringing the security situation under control? Surely you look at the number of attacks as well. What do you measure -- what's a reasonable amount? The death toll is certainly higher in the last couple of months, even if the number of attacks are down.

GEN. CASEY: But higher than what? Compared to the previous levels we saw --

Q Right. But that's exactly what I'm saying; you can look at these any number of ways. So what's a reasonable number?

GEN. CASEY: Yeah. I think that's a -- but that's a great question, because we ought not all get focused just on an attack, on the attacks as a measure of success in Iraq. In fact, we have been developing counter-insurgency metrics, where we look at a range of different variables. For example, tips. Are the people coming forward and giving information that helps us and our Iraqi security force counterparts deal with the insurgency? Political development and inclusion: is the political process still going forward? Are people still being brought into the political process? Do they want to be brought into the political process? And there's economic development indicators as well.

So there's a range of things that must be looked at so we can get some sense of how we're really doing. And I will tell you, we just completed a six-month assessment -- my staff did. This is the second one that we've done. And we went through all the different lines of operations. And we -- the conclusion of the staff was that we remain broadly on track to accomplish our strategic objectives.

Q General, with --

Q General, you -- can I just follow up? Can I please follow up?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Wait. No, no, no. No. Wait a minute. There's too much -- there's too much yelling. Wait a minute --

Q Do the people on the ground, the Iraqis --

SEC. RUMSFELD: -- we're not going to go that way. There's too much yelling, and not enough hands.

Q I'm not yelling. I wouldn't yell. (Laughs.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: You're up.

Q General Casey, to follow up on that, what are the -- what are the signs of progress you need to see, though, in the next year or whatever in terms of number of operationally effective battalions, command and control structures, equipment -- and this is standard forces -- of tanks, helicopters, whatever, that will allow you to recommend a significant drawdown of U.S. troops?

GEN. CASEY: The most significant thing that I need to see in the next year is the progress of this political process in Iraq. That will do more than anything we will do militarily to draw people away from the insurgency.

Now, to your -- the gist of your question, that -- with Iraqi security forces. In January, the first of January this year, there were no Iraqi divisions. The divisions weren't constituted until the sixth of January. It wasn't until the 1st of March that those Iraqi divisions were actually assigned pieces of Iraq that they were responsible for.

And it was also at that time that they were partnered with our divisions so that we could begin additional training support. It wasn't until the first of May where we were able to build a training and readiness metric, much like our own status report here, to measure the capabilities of the Iraqi forces holistically: personnel, readiness, leadership, training -- the whole bit, just like we do that. So, we just got our baseline assessment here the first of June. But we're starting to see -- and they are starting to be able to project -- when they may be capable of assuming battle space.

Q General, along those lines, when General Abizaid --

(Cross talk.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: Just a second. We'll call on people. Why don't we try to do this in an orderly way? Yes, sir?

Q Can I just -- can I just follow up on the Iraqi security forces?

SEC. RUMSFELD: No. No. (Laughter.)

Yes.

Q Mr. Secretary?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yes.

Q Mr. Secretary, my question is in connection with the Indian Defense Minister Mr. Pranab Mukherjke's visit to Washington, and also the build-up, military build-up and Chinese threat in the region. I don't know whether you are meeting with the Indian -- the prime minister or not, but if you are, sir, how do you put the military-to-military relationship between the United States and India today? And also, how can you justify to India as far as the F-16 sale to Pakistan and the Chinese threat in the region and the military build-up which you and Secretary Rice made several statements in the -- here the last few weeks?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I am meeting with the Indian minister of Defense this evening and then tomorrow. The military-to-military relationship between our two countries is excellent. It has been developed over a period of four and a half years in ways that today are multifaceted. We have advanced continuously in the relationship in terms of meetings and exercises and various other aspects of it. And I feel very good about it and very positive about it.

Yes, Barbara?

Q General Casey, I know it was addressed over the weekend, but could you clarify, as much as possible, what types of meetings are being held with insurgent groups in Iraq? Who is the United States meeting with? What are the goals? What have you been discussing? What are these meetings all about?

GEN. CASEY: Yeah. Our leaders, down to the divisional, even brigade level, routinely meet with local and tribal leaders. We also continue to meet at the national level with senior Sunni leaders. Characterizing these discussions as "negotiations" is probably not right. They're discussions, and they're discussions primarily aimed at bringing these Sunni leaders and the people they represent into the political process. But to characterize them as negotiations with insurgents about stopping the insurgency, we're not quite there yet.

Q Are you ruling out -- to be clear, you're limiting these discussions to Sunnis? Is it correct you are not meeting with any representatives of foreign fighters, including Zarqawi?

GEN. CASEY: Oh, we're definitely not meeting with any representatives of foreign fighters. And I didn't

--

SEC. RUMSFELD: But they're not limited to Sunnis. I mean, the Iraqi government and military leaders throughout the country are constantly reaching out to Shi'a, and Kurds and Sunnis, and attempting to bring people together in support of the country.

It's the same process that Karzai's going through in Afghanistan where he's talking not to the people with blood on their hands, but to Taliban people, trying to bring them into the process and -- the political process.

And I must say, it's been -- I've been impressed how overblown these meetings are -- these, quote, unquote "meetings." I don't know anything about specific meetings on specific days, nor does General Casey. But there are meetings going on all the time between people in Iraq and other people in Iraq attempting to get them to be supportive of the government, which is, obviously, the logical thing one does in a political process.

Q Not negotiations?

Q Point of clarification --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Oh, and certainly not with people like Zarqawi. I mean, that's just someone's imagination running wild.

Q Just a point of clarification, since we seem to be operating under Robert's Rules of Order here. (Laughter.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: What would you prefer, a free for all?

Q Just kind of raise my hand and wait to be called on.

These Sunni leaders that you talked about, General Casey, that have been part of the -- would you call them insurgent leaders, or are they simply Iraqis whose sympathies may or may not lie with a particular group? I mean, are there meetings -- and I think this was part of the confusion -- are there meetings with known leaders of the insurgency who have been involved in -- directly in attacks against U.S. and Iraqi forces, or are they something else?

GEN. CASEY: Not yet. Not to the best of my knowledge yet. We may start moving there. But the first thing we want to do is meet with Sunni leaders, and a lot of these folks claim they have leverage over the insurgents that we've yet to see realized, frankly.

So I think we'll ultimately get there with the Iraqis, but we're not there yet.

Q But "Sunni leaders" is not a synonym for "insurgent leaders"?

SEC. RUMSFELD: No.

GEN. CASEY: No, absolutely not. Absolutely not.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Pam?

Q Sir, on that same subject, would you trace for us what that path is between now and then? How do

you identify the insurgent leaders that you're willing to deal with? What time frame do you see that happening? It definitely sounds like something you've got cooking.

SEC. RUMSFELD: I think he said Sunni leaders, as opposed to insurgent leaders.

Didn't you?

Q I thought you said Sunni leaders --

Q You're not there yet.

Q You're not there yet, but it sounds like you're anticipating getting there at some point. How do you identify who you're willing to work with?

GEN. CASEY: What you have is a process where people are coming forward and saying that they want to be part of the political process, and they claim to have some -- exercise some level of control over insurgents. And so we need to have the basic meeting, kind of feel each other out, find out how much control they actually do have, and then build some trust, and then take another step. But it's going to be, you know, I think a long process. But I think it -- I really believe that it is something that can enhance the political process as we go toward the elections.

Q Mr. Secretary, earlier you expressed -- or appeared to express a certain amount of confidence in the ability of the American people to think this through and understand the major objectives in the global war on terrorism and the conflict in Iraq. Yet, public opinion polls -- the public confidence continues to erode in those public opinion polls. Is there a danger that the fall in the support of the American people in those polls could in fact embolden the enemy forces in Iraq to cause them to hold out?

And for you, General Casey, is the growing public political debate here in the United States, sometimes acrimonious, is there a danger there that that could eventually undermine the morale of the troops in Iraq?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, I do have confidence in the American people. I mean, look at this wonderful country we have that's survived so many difficult circumstances over many, many -- couple of centuries plus, now. So one has to have confidence in them.

If one thinks about what the alternative is and what the world would look like, were the United States not to be assisting the Iraqi government in creating a representative system there that's respectful of all minorities and elements in the country, it would be turning it over to terrorists, to the Zarqawi-type people, and it would become a training ground for terrorists. And it would -- they'd be right back where they were with -- maybe worse -- with a large, wealthy country engaged in terrorist acts and difficulties for their neighbors, and the region would be turning south.

So I think people understand that. And it doesn't take a genius to understand that the alternative is a -- is to turn it back to the dark course, the path of Zarqawi and beheadings and that type of thing. I don't think the American people want to go that direction.

Q Is there a danger that the enemy forces in Iraq can look at what's happening in the United States in terms of public opinion and just hold out?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Oh, sure, it's a test of wills. But it's no question, they know that. We've seen indications that senior terrorists like bin Laden and others have read things like "Black Hawk Down," and make analogies to Vietnam, and recognize that it's a test of wills. And it is. I mean, it certainly isn't a test of big

armies and big navies and big air forces contesting against each other. That's not what's taking place.

Q General Casey --

Q And the morale question?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yes?

Q Does the political debate -- I had a question.

GEN. CASEY: I think the troops are savvy enough to understand that there needs to be debate on these things. But I also think that expressions of support from the senior congressional and national leaders about what the troops are doing out there right now would also help substantially.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yes, go ahead.

Q General Casey, on Thursday on Capitol Hill, you talked about four broad categories of rating Iraqi security forces, but you didn't give any details about numbers because you said they're classified. And since the training of Iraqis is the linchpin of your strategy and the linchpin of the U.S. exit from Iraq, doesn't the American people -- don't the American people have some right to know how that mission is going, in terms of declassifying some of these figures?

GEN. CASEY: Yeah, I think we have to find a way to do that. But I think you can understand, reporting weekly or monthly on the readiness of units that are actually fighting in a combat zone is informing the enemy in a way that I don't think we want to do that. And so I think we'll work with the secretary's folks and figure out how we can declassify it in a way that we can present periodic progress reports, but at the same time, preserve our operational security of those units in Iraq.

Q General Casey, along those lines --

SEC. RUMSFELD: We're going to make this the last question.

Q -- Iraqi security forces --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Right here.

Q Thank you.

Iraq's prime minister has just said that two years will be, quote, "More than enough to establish security in our country." Is -- could you all comment on that? Is that a reasonable expectation?

SEC. RUMSFELD: You know, I'm -- I recognize things I don't know, and that's one of them. The reality is that there are so many variables in this. Partly it's, as was suggested earlier, the behavior of the neighbors, Syria and Iran. To the extent they are constantly behaving in a way that's harmful, that makes it more difficult. Partly it's the pace at which the Iraqi security forces and the ministries develop the skills, the numbers and the sophistication and chain of command so that they can do a better job. Partly it's the extent to which the Iraqi people -- after the constitution is drafted and after the election takes place under the constitution -- kind of all nod to themselves and say, "Fair enough; we've now got our own constitution that we drafted. We've got our own election under that constitution." And these people that are running around killing innocent Iraqis are bad people, and the -- General Casey's point about the number of tips we're getting -- they're going up now, significantly. I don't know that they're going up because of a change in public attitude as much as the fact that

they wisely put in an anonymous phone number that people can now call, and we're getting a manifestation of the people's anger at the insurgents for the fact that they are going out and killing so many innocent Iraqi people.

But there are so many variables that I would be reluctant to pretend that I could look into that crystal ball and say "x" number of months or "x" number of years. I can't.

One thing I do believe very deeply -- and I think I'll end up being right, you never know in life, but -- I honestly believe that this insurgency is going to be defeated by the Iraqi people and not by coalition countries and not by the United States, and that our task is to give them, the Iraqi peoples an environment within which they can do that.

And insurgencies can last periods of years, as we know from history, and countries can do just fine. They can continue and have elections, and go about their business; their economies can grow. And there can be a low-level insurgency. But in the last analysis, it's going to be defeated by the Iraqi people and by the Iraqi government and by the support of the people in deciding that that's not how they want to live their lives. They don't want to get up in the morning and go outside and risk being killed. They want to turn in the people that are misbehaving, and turn in the violent extremists who are trying to deny other people the right to live their lives in a reasonable way.

Q Are you going to stay till that happens?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Pardon me?

Q You going to stay on till that happens?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Oh, come on!

Thank you, folks.

Q Thank you.

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