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Presenter: Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Richard Myers May 13, 2004 10:40 PM EDT

Town Hall Meeting With U.S. Troops

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SEC. RUMSFELD: What a sight! This is -- those who have a seat, be seated. Those that don't, stay standing. And thank you for coming and being here.

General Myers and I are proud to be here with the first team. We had a meeting -- the days are kind of blurring together, but today's what, Thursday or something? We had a meeting earlier this week, I think it was on Monday, with President Bush. And we told him that we were thinking about coming out here because we wanted to have a chance to look you folks in the eye and tell you how proud we are and what a wonderful job you folks are doing.

And he said to give you his respect. He knows what you're doing is noble work, he knows it's important, he values it and appreciates it, and wanted to send his personal regards.

You folks have helped to liberate 25 million human beings. You've also performed any number of acts of kindness, generosity and compassion to the Iraqi people that you've met, that you've worked with. I know you have security responsibilities to be sure, but I'm told that you folks have also trained new members of the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps; you've built playgrounds and a sports complex; you've improved local health clinics; and you're showing the Iraqi people and, indeed, the people of the world who will look, the character of the country that we're from and the character of the men and women in the armed services.

In recent days there's been a focus on a few who have betrayed our valued and -- values and sullied the reputation of our country. Like each of you I'm sure, and like most Americans, I was stunned. It was a body blow. And with six or seven investigations under way and a country that has values and a military justice system that has values, we know that those involved, whoever they are, will be brought to justice. And we've spent the day talking to people and seeing the steps that have been taken to see that those types of abuses to people for whom we have responsibility and custody will not happen again.

But it's important for each of you to know that that is not the values of America and it's not your values. And I know that and you know that and your families know that. And we're proud of you, each of you. We're proud of your service. We know each of you is here because you volunteered to serve your country. You said that that is important to you, and it's important to our country that we have the freedom that we all enjoy.

You know, the American men and women in uniform over the decades, they helped to defeat Germany and Japan in World War II and then helped to rebuild them. They've helped with the folks in Bosnia and Kosovo, and some of you have undoubtedly been involved in that; they're currently helping people in Liberia and in Haiti; and they understand America and our values. The people of the world understand that also. We hear a lot of criticism in the press, but the fact of the matter is that people every year line up to come to the United States of America. They want to become American citizens, and the reason they do is because they know, as Abraham Lincoln said, that the United States is the last best hope of humankind. I've stopped reading the newspapers. (Laughter, cheers, applause.)

It's a fact. I'm a survivor.

And instead, I've been reading a book about Ulysses S. Grant and the Civil War and the challenges that our country faced during that period. And of course, there are enormous differences between that conflict and this conflict. But I was constantly struck as I each evening -- and indeed, coming over on the plane I spent some time reading the book. In that conflict there were casualties that were just horrendous. There were battles, several battles, where a thousand, 2,000, 3,000, were lost in two or three days.

Back then the debate was vigorous; indeed, I would say vicious. Politicians were saying things about each other and about the conflict that were almost unprintable. Editorials were written that were critical of everything. I guess that's what editorial writers do. There were no e-mails or telephones to be used back in those days, but there were soldiers' diaries and letters, and letters from home. And it was interesting to read them.

There were questions -- honest questions -- by the politicians, by the editorial writers, by the families. Can we win? Is it worth it? Those are big questions. And you could see that the back and forth and the heartfelt concern and the questions and the unbelievable criticism of Abraham Lincoln, and indeed the criticism of generals on both sides -- but they were steadfast. And those veterans, when they looked back on that conflict and saw a nation that was together, a single nation, a union, they knew they had been part of something really big. And it had been worth it.

You folks are young. I'm not. (Laughter.) But you're going to look back on this conflict, on these debates, on these difficulties, and it's going to be a tough road ahead. We know that. It's not going to be an easy path from a repressive dictatorship to a stable, prosperous, successful country that respects all of the various religious and ethnic groups, that's at peace with its neighbors, that understands what human rights are. That's not an easy path, it's a tough path. And there will be plenty of potholes in the road, and mistakes will get made, and people will have to be picked up and put back on that path towards a freer system. But one day you're going to look back and you're going to be proud of your service, and you're going to say it was worth it.

Thank you very much. (Cheers, applause.)

Thank you. Thank you.

I don't get to do this often; usually Dick Myers introduces me. But today we reversed it and I get to introduce General Dick Myers, the Air Force four-star general who's been serving first as the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and for, I guess, the past three years, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He's from Kansas. Is there anyone here --

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hoo-ah!! (Laughter.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: (Laughs.) There you go! I'm from Illinois. (Cheers, applause.)

But Dick Myers' service is a model for our country. He is courageous. He's a pilot. He's intelligent. He's

patriotic. He's dedicated. And he is a wonderful partner.

General Dick Myers.

GEN. MYERS: (Cheers, applause.) Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Thank you very much. Thank you. I think I can speak for the secretary to say how happy we are to be here. We are really happy to be here. I mean, we are really, really happy to be there. (Cheers, applause.) And I'm not going to go into that any more. (Laughter.)

Let me also tell you how proud I am to stand up here in this uniform, the same uniform you wear, and be part of this team. You have never let us down. Never, ever. I have so much confidence in you. Every time that I have to go in front of the public and talk about our military, sometimes it's about the good things we do; most of the time it's about that. Occasionally it's about the few who stray. But I have never lost confidence in the folks that wear this uniform. (Applause.)

And I'm confident for a variety of reasons. I'm confident because you bring the essential goodness of America to our armed forces. I'm confident because you're well trained. I'm confident because you're well led, you're well equipped. You understand the importance of what we do day in and day out, whether it's here in Iraq, or Afghanistan, or the Horn of Africa, or the Philippines, or wherever it is in the world that we serve the United States of America. I'm confident because I know you know what you're doing, what the mission is, and you're ready to do it.

I'm really confident in your leadership. If you've heard any of the testimony -- and I hope you had other things to do -- but if you heard any of the testimony here in the last few days, I hope you heard me say on numerous occasions of my confidence in the chain of command. And I'm talking about General John Abizaid, I'm talking about General Rick Sanchez, General Tom Metz, everybody on down to the platoon sergeant and the squad leader, leadership that makes a difference all around this world every day of our lives.

And we got to take just a second and flip that chain of command and we got to look up. And the secretary mentioned the president came to the Pentagon this week. And I'll tell you what. As you look up the chain of command -- and as you know, I'm not in it, I'm an adviser off to the side, but I interact with the chain of command as a military adviser to the National Security Council, to the president, to the secretary. As you look up at our chain of command, you couldn't have better leadership in providing us the direction, the resources and sometimes -- and the strategic vision that we need to make a difference in this world. And I'm talking about our Secretary of Defense and our Commander in Chief.

AUDIENCE: (extended applause.)

GEN. MYERS: I'll tell you also I'm confident about our justice system in the military. If we -- those who stray, there will be due process. And those that are guilty of something, they'll be punished appropriately. And those that aren't guilty will be returned to duty. That's the way it works.

To tie in just a little bit to what the secretary was saying towards the end, in one of our hearings this week, Senator Stevens, who is on the Senate Appropriations Committee -- he's the chairman of the Subcommittee on Defense -- said -- and a World War II veteran -- and he said, you know, they've written about the World War II generation as being the greatest generation. But, he said, it's this generation right now that is the next greatest generation. And I think that there are millions and millions of Americans, probably millions and millions of Iraqis and Afghanistan citizens that understand that same thing. You are the greatest generation. (Cheers, applause.)

Again, I couldn't be prouder to represent you, as I have a chance to do often. And from those millions of Americans that you correspond with -- I know I get a lot of correspondence -- they understand this cause. They

understand that it's a noble cause. They understand that what you're doing is going to change the course of history, as the Secretary said. It's just going to change the course of history. There is no doubt that we're going to be victorious, no doubt whatsoever.

AUDIENCE: Hoo-ah! (Applause.)

GEN. MYERS: And that's the reason, right there. (Applause.) That's the reason right there: your spirit, your attitude; again, the essential goodness of America as it's reflected in you and the job you do day in and day out. I couldn't be prouder.

And I thank you so much for your service and I thank you for your families' service as well. We've got to remember -- you remember it every day, but I think it's important that we all remember -- that there are a lot of other folks that serve that don't wear this uniform, and they're your families and your loved ones.

AUDIENCE: Hoo-ah!

GEN. MYERS: And they put up with a lot of stuff when you're not around. And if my guess is right and if it happens in your family like it happens in my family, the day you leave is the day the car doesn't work, the washing machine breaks down or the toilet overflows. (Laughter.) I mean, isn't that about right?

AUDIENCE: Hoo-ah!

GEN. MYERS: And it's -- but it's more than that. We ask them to attend the high school graduations this spring you're not going to attend, and all the other things that go with that. So we thank you for that. We thank you for your service. And we thank your families for their service.

Thank you very much. (Cheers, extended applause.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: Thank you. Thank you very much.

After that fabulous set of remarks by General Myers, I hate to even do this. But I'm told that we're supposed to stay here and answer some questions. (Laughter.)

GEN. MYERS: That's our favorite thing to do. (Laughter.) And you'd think we'd get better at it, with all our practice.

SEC. RUMSFELD: It's generally a lot more fun here than it is back home. But -- are there microphones, or what? People just sound off? How do we do this?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Good! All right. We can take anything you can dish out. (Laughter). When I say "we," I mean Dick Myers. (Laughter.)

Who's got a question? Right there, young lady. There's the mike.

Q (Inaudible.)

I can hear you fine.

Q Mr. Secretary, my name is (name inaudible). I'm with the 434 Reserves out of Atlanta, Georgia. (Scattered applause, cheers.)

GEN. MYERS: How many reservists in here? (Cheers of "hoo-ah.") And I mean Guard, too. We got

Guard and Reserve? (Cheers of "hoo- ah.") There you go.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Think of that.

Q Mr. Secretary, you have said that you would like to reduce the number of troops in Iraq. Instead, more troops are being sent over, and an increasing number of troops are reservists. What will be -- (inaudible) -- and the fact that reservists who are involved in -- (inaudible).

(Laughter, applause.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: You know, I always don't like the first question. (Laughter.) Anyone who's so eager to ask that first question has got something on their mind. (Laughter.)

Well, you're right, our goal is to not have troops in Iraq; it's to have the Iraqi people take charge of their country and take charge of their security. (Cheers of "hoo-ah.") And that's why you folks are working so hard to help recruit and train and equip and deploy and mentor the Iraqi security forces. So our goal is to pass that responsibility to them as soon as they're capable of taking it.

It's also correct to say that we are -- have increased the total number from 115,000 to about 138,000. Because of the changeover, General Abizaid, who knows -- has known from the beginning that when he needs something, we're going to provide it because this is an important mission, and clearly, we're going to do that. And he said he needed more troops; that the situation here was difficult. And we said fair enough -- the president said fair enough. And the quickest way to have more troops was during that crossover period, we asked -- and we didn't like doing it, but we did, we asked some folks, I think basically from the 1st Infantry Division -- is that right?

GEN. MYERS: 1st Armored.

SEC. RUMSFELD: -- to stay over the extra 90 days --

GEN. MYERS: The 1st Armored Division.

SEC. RUMSFELD: -- the 1st Armored Division to stay over, up to 90 days. They've been terrific, they've been absolutely fabulous. (Applause.) They have stepped up to the plate and they've done it and they're doing it well and we are deeply grateful to them.

Now, the last part of your question -- I should say "questions" -- plural. (Laughter.) You should become a journalist! (Laughter.) You pointed out, correctly, that it happened that there were reservists involved in the abuses that took place at the Abu Ghraib prison. And you asked if that would have any effect on how we would manage the total force and whether we would or would not want to use reservists.

The answer is, we have a total force. The reservists are doing a spectacular job for our country. The Guard is doing a great job. And the active force is doing a great job. And you can be absolutely certain that the abuses of a few are not going to change how we manage this force. And we are deeply appreciative to all elements of it -- active component, reserve component. And we need all of you to make this thing work for our country. (Cheers of "hoo-ah" followed by applause.)

So the answer is yes, yes and no. (Laughter.)

Question. Here's a mike, and anyone who has a question, why don't you wander towards one of the fellows with mikes? There's one right here. Good.

Q How you doing, sir? (Inaudible.) I have force protection questions, sir.

SEC. RUMSFELD: You have what?

Q Force protection.

SEC. RUMSFELD: General Myers. (Laughter.)

Q Sir, my unit, the 2nd Brigade -- (inaudible) -- Cav, we have five out of the six red zones in this country. And with the up- armored humvees, the new -- (off mike) -- humvees they're bringing over with the -- (inaudible) -- those doors are not as good as the ones on the up-armored humvees -- (inaudible). We even lost quite -- we lost some soldiers due to them, and we're trying to make a change -- (inaudible). The question is, are we going to get more up-armored humvees?

And the second question I wanted to ask is, they have the new -- (inaudible) -- vests out that covers your -- (inaudible). We need those because we have taken some casualties due to the shrapnel from IEDs going through the side. The front parts are good, but the sides are not.

Thank you.

GEN. MYERS: Good points. Excellent points.

You can imagine we spend a lot of time on force protection, and our responsibility, I think, is to ensure we have the resources and protection lines and all that cranked up to get the equipment we need.

You mentioned the vests and now the part for the armpits and the sides that are not covered with the SAPI plates and not covered adequately by the vest. They're -- we producing them and sending them over here as fast as we can.

You do not have all the up-armored humvees you need. You got about -- around 3,000 out of the 4,400 roughly that they want over here, that your leaders want. Production is ramping up this month. I think it's around 220, 225 per month. We've gathered them from all other services that had them except for a few we held back for a nuclear security role back in the United States. The rest of them shipped over here. We're trying to get them to you as fast as we can. We understand the difference they can make, and for that matter we're shipping some armor over as well. You know, some of the units came over lighter, and you're probably one of them, and so you're going to get some of your stuff back to do the job that you have to do.

But that's something that I have a chance to talk to Congress about a lot. Congress is -- will provide any amount of resources. They've been very good about this issue, in fact about all issues when it comes to our efforts here, (also) in Afghanistan, and in the global war on terrorism. But specifically on force protection, many members of Congress are very, very serious about this.

It's not a matter of resources, it's a matter of how fast can we build these things and get them over here. And I review that probably daily, the status of those machines and that equipment that can help.

And we've got to do better. I mean, we've got a lot of folks looking at the improvised explosive device problem. And to date we have not found any magic remedy for those devices, but I'm not convinced there's not something out there. So we've got a lot of money going towards that effort. I think there are 130-some different organizations that are looking at it from all different angles, led by the United States Army.

So we're trying. We're trying hard. And we understand -- I understand exactly everything you said, and we'll do our best. And that's our responsibility. (Applause.)

Q Mr. Secretary, Specialist -- (inaudible) -- Washington. My question is about R&R. And I've been on other deployments than this --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Could you get the mike up a little closer to him? Good.

Q I've been on -- every deployment -- (inaudible) --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Which deployment?

Q To Kosovo, sir. And on our R&R, our flights were paid for, our R&R. This time we're told we're going to have to pay for our own tickets -- (inaudible) -- back to Washington. Is that true? And if it's not, will we be reimbursed for paying for our own plane ticket, sir?

SEC. RUMSFELD: My recollection --

GEN. MYERS: That's not true. That's not true. Congress has provided -- put a provision in the law to be able to pay for those, and I think that still applies. I do not -- the staff will tell me if I'm wrong here, but no, I think you get a ticket all the way to wherever you want to wind up and all the way back. (Applause.) That probably wasn't true when you served in Kosovo, because that's a fairly new provision.

Q Will it be paid only back to -- (inaudible)?

GEN. MYERS: No, you're going to get paid all the way to wherever you want to put your foot down.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Where are you from, Washington State or Washington, D.C.?

Q Washington State, sir. (Inaudible)

SEC. RUMSFELD: The last I looked, they had just -- the Army had just changed the port of arrival from Baltimore to Atlanta and -- Dallas, I think -- because it was much better for more people.

And if it proves that Dick Myers is wrong, he'll step up and pay for your ticket. (Laughter, cheers, applause.)

GEN. MYERS: And I will, because I know I'm right!

SEC. RUMSFELD: But only yours! (Laughs.)

Question?

Q Good evening, Mr. Secretary. Captain -- (inaudible). Sir, my question is, you testified in Congress just the other day, right before you flew out to see us and --

SEC. RUMSFELD: It was not my first choice! (Laughter.) If it weren't for the honor of the thing, I'd rather be here.

Q Yes. This is the second time you've testified this week, sir, for pay and allocations in the budget for the armed forces.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yes.

Q Do we foresee an increase across the board so we maybe get more additional -- armored kits, or

armor, hazard pay, weapons, basic health and comfort items for soldiers overseas?

GEN. MYERS: There is -- when you talk about equipment items, I'm not sure of any budget shortfall that prohibits from providing the kind of equipment we need to do our job. We have other issues in production and getting things going, like the up-armored humvees as we try to ramp up production; it takes time to facilitate a plant so they can produce more. But -- so there's some lag times. But it's not an issue of funding.

I think all of the quality of life initiatives that are in this year's budget, that will be approved, hopefully, this fall and go into effect in fiscal year '05, which starts 1 October of this year, pay raises, and so forth, are consistent with our -- the past, matter of fact.

Now, there are some things that need to be looked at. And when it comes to the Reserves, we need to do, I think, some things there with regard to medical care. There need to be more regular examinations so when you're mobilized, if you haven't been mobilized in a while, haven't had an exam in a while, you don't show up in bad shape. And that's part of it. There's some portability of your caregivers to TriCare, when you come under TriCare, if that's what you elect to do when you come on active duty. And there are some issues there that are being worked with the Congress that we're trying to work to make it better, specifically for the Reserve component.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Question? Yes, sir?

Q First Sergeant (inaudible) of the 250th MI from Southern California. And my question is -- (inaudible). I've been deployed now for five months and I've been struggling to try to get my handicapped son some health care, some physical therapy. And out-of-network issues are -- (inaudible) -- his progress. Sir, do you have -- (inaudible) -- help me get my son -- (inaudible)?

GEN. MYERS: Now, you said -- the part I couldn't understand because of that mike, what kind of issues are keeping you from doing that?

Q The new physical therapies that are out there, out-of-network facilities, and the cost of installation of special equipment; -- (inaudible) -- installation, and labor is always more than the equipment itself.

GEN. MYERS: I'll tell you what, you've got a specific question. We've got a TriCare surgeon back here, and he'll be -- Dr. Baxter I'm sure is in the crowd, and he'll be happy to take your name and get you the information you need.

SEC. RUMSFELD: He's right over there with his hand up.

GEN. MYERS: There he is with his hand up, and he'll be happy to talk to you about that and work your issue. (Applause.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: Question, yes.

Q (Inaudible) -- 1st Cavalry Division. The question that I have, sir, is, just reading the news reports about what's going on at the United Nations, seems like there's a new U.N. Security Council resolution that's in the works, pretty far along. Some comments yesterday by the incoming president of the United Nations Security Council indicates that at least in his belief there's a lot -- there's a potential for troops from many other countries, joining either the coalition or as part of a U.N. Security Council force. (inaudible) The question I have is --

SEC. RUMSFELD: (Laughs.) I don't think this outfit's fully digital or audio -- (laughter.)

GEN. MYERS: These are warriors, that's what they are.

Q (Inaudible) -- it appears that there's a U.N. Security Council resolution in the works. And based upon comments a couple days ago by the incoming president of the Security Council himself, it appears that there may be troops from a lot of countries, such as, I believe, Indonesia, Pakistan, and so forth, that may be arriving in the theater in the near future. Under the new Security Council resolution, do you see our mission changing, our relationship with some of the other countries that may be coming into the ground? And if so, what do you see in the next, say, six months?

Thank you.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Thank you.

Since the U.N. Security Council resolution just prior to the Iraq war, the United States has been working with the United Nations, attempting to get an additional resolution that would provide an umbrella for a number of countries in the world to feel they could participate. Currently we have about 33 countries, I believe, that are participating in the international coalition.

A lot of us are reasonably convinced that if we can get another U.N. Security Council resolution, which we believe we can, that it would assist in getting, oh, maybe one or two handfuls of countries to add troops that have thus far not felt they could do so. That would be a very good thing. To the extent that we can further internationalize it and get those countries feeling they have a commitment in the success of Iraq and the success of this important effort, that's good.

How might it change our circumstance? I think not greatly, except that it would obviously relieve pressure on the coalition countries, including the United States, because you would bring in troops from still additional countries, and that's a big help.

In terms of the command and control or the leadership of it, there's two ways the U.N. can do something. They can pass a resolution and put in a blue-helmeted -- so-called blue-helmeted U.N. force that is led by the United Nations or some lead country; they're not likely to do that. It simply is not going to happen in any near term. Instead what they might do is pass another resolution that enables, oh, a number of countries that thus far -- for example, we're -- I don't suppose I should mention countries, but we're currently in discussion.

I kind of think other countries ought to be able to say for themselves what they're doing, so I try to avoid doing it. I wish more people would do that with things I'm doing. (Laughter.) But they seem not to do that, so that's life. But I would guess we're probably talking to a couple of handfuls, maybe three handfuls of nations that have capabilities to bring forces in. And the discussions are quite far along with respect to a number of them. And I'm encouraged. I think we'll find that we will get additional forces.

GEN. MYERS: I'd just like to say one thing to Captain -- it is Spears (sp)?

Q Yes, sir.

GEN. MYERS: Good. No, just sit there.

With a question like that, he is a terrific candidate for the Joint Staff.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yeah! (Laughter.)

GEN. MYERS: We got a place in J-5 for a man like that. That's a pretty "thoughty" question.

SEC. RUMSFELD: (Laughs.)

Question?

STAFF (?): We have a question over here.

GEN. MYERS: Just joking.

Q My name is -- (inaudible) -- civilian. I'm over here with -- (inaudible). (Applause.) .

SEC. RUMSFELD: Don't clap too loud. Let's hear the question. (Laughter.)

Q Sir, there are many DOD civilians who are here in the theater, and many of us are unarmed. And many times we're placed in harm's way in convoys and we have no means to protect ourselves. And I know there's been many memos and letters I've seen floating around saying it's the policy to arm civilians if they need to be armed, if they're in harm's way. But there seems to be a resistance -- (inaudible) -- to actually provide arms to us. I was wondering what the current policy is on that.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, I could do several things at this point. I could admit I don't know -- (laughter) -- what the current policy is here, or I could turn around and ask General Rick Sanchez to come over here.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS: Hoo-ah! (Applause.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: An I'm going to let him say that he doesn't know. (Laughter.)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL RICARDO SANCHEZ: Sir. (Laughter.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: The question is about --

GEN. SANCHEZ: You got to remember all those good things that were said here before I came up, sir. Yes, sir?

SEC. RUMSFELD: The question -- did you hear the question?

GEN. SANCHEZ: No, sir.

SEC. RUMSFELD: The question is about the policy currently in Iraq with respect to allowing civilians who have reason to be in difficult situations to be armed. And I didn't know the answer. And I knew that if you didn't know the answer, you could at least get the answer.

GEN. SANCHEZ: Yes, sir, we'll be able to get the definitive answer. But right now, we have been working to try to get the authorities to arm the civilians here. That has been an issue for some time. And you're right, we're working that and we have been for some time. And we'll get -- I'll get a specific status for you. Okay?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Good. (Applause.)

Question? Yes, sir?

Q Sir, Captain -- (inaudible).

SEC. RUMSFELD: Captain, what do you do when you're not lifting weights? (Laughter.)

Q My duty, sir. (Laughter.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: (Laughs.) I see. (Laughter.)

Q Sir, mine's a little lighter question, not Joint Staff material. (Laughter, applause.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: But he's got an 18-inch neck. (Laughter.)

GEN. MYERS: We need them on the Joint Staff, too.

Q Funny, sir, ESPN doesn't do much coverage over here on events in Iraq. And I don't know if you heard last night, but Iraq beat Saudi Arabia 3-1, so --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Heard of it. Heard it.

Q And from a ground commander's perspective, sir, of a company, I got to tell you, this morning was the happiest I've seen the Iraqi people in a long time, over a soccer game. And my question to you, sir, is there anything we can do to help these people with such events such as -- simple as soccer?

SEC. RUMSFELD: No, there's no question but that -- we say as simple as soccer, but it isn't simple. It's a chance for the Iraqi people -- if you think that the Iraqi Olympic Committee was run by one of Saddam Hussein's sons and it was a vicious process, an evil process what they did. And so what you're seeing is that the Iraqi people today do have a chance to play soccer. They do have a chance to compete in the Olympics. They even sent over a symphony that is being done. And it's a reflection of how important it is for people to be free, for them to be able to do whatever it is they feel they'd like to do. And I'm told that they're putting together an Olympic wrestling team, and as a broken down ex-wrestler I'm kind of partial to that, too.

Thank you very much. (Cheers, applause.)

Question? Right over here.

Q Good evening, sir. Staff Sergeant Moore (sp?) from the -- (inaudible) -- headquarters out of Fort -- (inaudible).

AUDIENCE: Hoo-ah! (Applause.)

Q And my question is about stability when we return home. I, like a bunch of people here and including my brothers, who are in Afghanistan right now, are on our second tours already within two years. I volunteered to come back over here because it's my duty to serve, but a lot of people don't get a chance to say hey, I'm ready to come back. Is there a plan for stability? So far, from what I've seen, sir, is you can volunteer for certain units, the ones that are coming back -- (inaudible).

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, first of all, thank you for volunteering to serve in the first place, and also thank you for volunteering to come back.

AUDIENCE: Hoo-ah! (Applause.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: And tell your brothers in Afghanistan we appreciate them as well.

We have 20th-century industrial-age planning tools in terms of force management. They're making major efforts to improve them and they're getting better, but they're far from perfect.

Dick Myers and I spend a lot of time when we look at the force rotations as to who should follow, which units should follow. And we try to find ways to encourage volunteers to have that opportunity, if in fact they'd like to. Sometimes we lack this ability into -- far enough down because people move between units, and some unit

may have just come back from Korea or just come back from Bosnia or Kosovo, and then their unit would be put into the force rotation. And it's unfortunate in some instances, whereas there are people who would like to get in the queue to come back over in the first place.

All I can tell you is the Joint Staff works it with the Joint Forces Command and the services. We're getting better at it every day. Indeed, I have to give enormous credit to the Transportation Command and the folks that have moved roughly 135,000 people one way, and 135,000 people another way. And we are impressed by how successful they have been. But we've got a way to go, I guess, in answer to your question. But we're -- (to General Myers) -- Dick, do you want to add anything?

GEN. MYERS: I would like to add just a couple of things, Army- specific. As you know, your chief of staff, General Schoomaker, has got a couple of initiatives going to try to address this problem. And this is -- I would call it transformational. It's not going to happen overnight, obviously.

The first one is fewer permanent change of station moves. It's a big part. There is -- we spent one day this week, the secretary and I had breakfast with some members of the United States Senate talking about global posture review -- (audience laughs as a journalist works his way through the crowd to place a microphone) -- looking at how we're arrayed -- (laughter, applause.) If he's friendly, this is okay!

SEC. RUMSFELD: Who is he?! (Laughter, applause.) Where did he come from?!

GEN. MYERS: Right through all these guys with guns. I don't know!

But look at how we're postured globally and you'll probably see some changes that will affect that as well. But a lot of these changes -- and going to the new brigade structure, more brigades. We're going to increase brigades by about 25 percent, which will help us. But that's not going to help us until -- start helping us until '06.

So there are a lot of things, as the secretary said, that are systemic, that we've lived with for decades that we have to change. And you have a very smart chief of staff of the Army and a very good staff up there that's looking at things to help do what you want to do.

Now, let me just say one more thing. Being over here now on your second tour, let's think about how important our mission is. What stands between extremism and the safety and security of our country in large measure are people in uniform, in large measure are people in uniform. We have lots of other folks doing this, lots of great civilians, both at the Department of Defense, Department of State -- other departments and agencies of our government. But people in uniform bear and shoulder a big burden when it comes to this war on terrorism.

This is a serious threat. You know it. You know it. It's the kind of threat that delivers bodies, unfortunately, like we saw last weekend, for Nick Berg. And you're making that difference.

And so I guess what I'm telling you is, we're going to try to transform our armed forces to make them a 21st century force. We will not be entirely efficient in doing that, and we can't do it overnight. It's going to take a long, long time. It's also, though, so important to serve and to stretch, and we're going to have to stretch. And you've already -- you already are. You know that. Your families are stretching and we've got to do this. We've got to get this right. There is no substitute but to win, and it's going to take a lot of sacrifice in the meantime.

Thank you.

SEC. RUMSFELD: I'm told we've run out of time. I want you to know that the American people have a very good center of gravity. They're sound., They're sensible. They understand what's taking place and they support you.

And I just, first, want to -- before I close, I want to apologize to the people in the upper rings because there were no microphones up there. But I want you to know we're glad you're up there as well. (Cheers, applause.)

Thank you for your service. May God bless you and your wonderful families.

Thank you very much. (Cheers, applause.)

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