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**Presenter: Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld**

**September 19, 2002 7:00 PM EDT**

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### **Secretary Rumsfeld Interview with Jim Lehrer, News Hour, PBS WETA**

Wednesday, September 18, 2002 - 7:00 p.m. EDT

(Rumsfeld Interview with Jim Lehrer, News Hour, PBS WETA)

JIM LEHRER: And to the Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Mr. Secretary, welcome.

SECRETARY DONALD RUMSFELD (Defense Department): Thank you.

LEHRER: Forty-eight hours later, how does Iraq's offer to let inspectors back in look to you?

RUMSFELD: Well, it looks a lot like earlier ploys and plays and moves that Iraq has taken. It's very clear that even within the letter it has contradictions. It in one place talks about without any constraints or conditions, and then later in the letter it talks about beginning negotiations and discussions about how it would be done.

Second, it's interesting that here's a letter that purports to say that, fair enough, we're willing to work with the U.N. and allow inspectors in, and within the last 48 hours they've fired on American aircraft six times in Northern and Southern Iraq.

LEHRER: I assume that's the no fly zone?

RUMSFELD: In the no fly zones that the coalition forces, the United States and Great Britain and men and women in uniform from our two countries have been flying over those zones, implementing the U.N. resolutions, and they fired from the ground artillery and rockets at these aircraft six times since that letter was delivered. If that isn't a signal as to what they have in mind, I don't know what it is.

LEHRER: So, this letter should be ignored by the United States and the U.N.?

RUMSFELD: Oh, it's a letter not to the United States, it's a letter to the United Nations. And that's for the president and Secretary Powell to work with. I'm just really repeating what Secretary Powell has said with respect to the letter. It's pretty clear that it is not what it seems to be.

LEHRER: But in terms of inspections, you said - you told the Congress today that this isn't about inspections this is about disarmament. Is inspections not a step toward disarmament?

RUMSFELD: That is what was hoped years ago, after the Gulf War. The hope was that Iraq would become a country that would disarm as they signed and agreed to do at the end of the war. The U.N. resolutions said that the way to implement that disarmament was to have inspectors in. And clearly that's one way to do it. Inspectors have the benefit of working pretty well, if they're working with a country that wants to disarm, and has agreed to disarm. And then they invite inspectors in so that the world can know that they, in fact, did do it. It only works if you have a cooperative partner. You can't go in and inspect a country that's resisting those inspections and expect to find very much, because so much of it is mobile, so much of it is underground. So, there clearly is a role in our world for inspections, but it tends to be with a cooperative partner, and we've seen the situation with Iraq where they've violated some 16 U.N. resolutions, and finally threw the inspectors out.

LEHRER: Do you see, based on everything that you know, do you see any scenario that could disarm Iraq the way the United States wants it to be disarmed short of military action?

RUMSFELD: I don't think it's the United States that wants Iraq to be disarmed, it was the world community, the international.

LEHRER: The world community.

RUMSFELD: The United Nations voted repeatedly, over and over, and over, that that is what Iraq agreed to do that.

LEHRER: But I mean now, that was years ago now, and we're in this situation now, and the president of the United States says, no more, action has to be taken, this has to end. Do you see a scenario short of military action that's going to get what the president and the world community wants to get, which is a disarmed Iraq?

RUMSFELD: Well, one would certainly hope so. That is to say that, no one with any sense would want to go to war, war is a last result, not a first result. We've gone through 11 years of violating these U.N. resolutions. We've gone through 11 years where -- recent years, four years, where they threw the inspectors out, and there's been no one there. And their progress on weapons of mass destruction, chemical, biological and nuclear have gone forward. Now, if Saddam Hussein and his family decided that the game was up, and we'll go live in some foreign country, like other leaders have done, clearly the Shah of Iran left, Idi Amin left, Baby Doc Duvalier left, any number of leaders who have departed their countries recognizing that the game was up, that it was over, that they'd run their term. So that could happen. It's entirely possible that the people in that country, a lot of wonderful people who are hostages, they're hostages to a very vicious regime, they could decide that it was time, the time was up, and change the regime from inside. It's a very repressive regime. It would be a very difficult thing to do. But, clearly, the overwhelming majority of people, even in the army don't want Saddam Hussein there. Look what he's done to the country. He's a pariah. He's threatening his neighbors. He's listed on the terrorist state. Their economy should be a booming economy with those oil revenues. And those people would want to be liberated.

LEHRER: As Secretary of Defense, let's say that all those possibilities do not pan out, and let's say some kind of military action is required down the road, whenever. As Secretary of Defense, what would you say to the young men and women of America and their families as to why this is in the vital interest of this country to a point where they have to risk their lives for it?

RUMSFELD: Well, you know, it's interesting in your opening remarks you were talking about the congressional hearings on September 11th, and the fact that they've spent months pouring over all kinds of documentation and trying to connect the dots. What happened, what did people know, and how might they have figured it out sooner so that we could have prevented 3,000 innocent men, women and children from being killed on September 11th of last year. What we're trying to do -- that's difficult, and they are having a dickens of a time trying to figure out that. We're trying to connect the dots before there is another September 11th. We're trying to connect the dots not only before there's another September 11th on our country, but before there's a September 11th that involves weapons of mass destruction, biological or chemical, or a nuclear weapon. That is a serious responsibility that the government has. It's not an easy thing to do. It is a difficult thing to do. Indeed, it's more difficult than trying to connect the dots after it's happened. But if we wait until after it's happened, we're not talking about 3,000 people being killed when this happened on September 11th, we're talking about potentially tens of thousands of people being killed.

LEHRER: But what do you say --

RUMSFELD: And you say to them, you say to the American people, the first responsibility of government is to provide for the common defense. That is what the central government is there for, very essentially. That's its principal task. And as one looks at the world and sees this new security environment and sees the nexus between weapons of mass destruction, terrorist states, and terrorist networks, and reflects on last September 11th, reflects on our vulnerability as free people, and how many people can come into our country and do things in our country, and how available today biological weapons and chemical weapons, and, indeed, elements of nuclear weapons are today, what one would say is, if we want to live in a more peaceful world, if we want to avoid that kind of a catastrophe, our country has to recognize that new security environment, and recognize that absorbing that blow, waiting for it and absorbing it, and then having an investigation afterward is not a preferred option.

LEHRER: What would you say to an American people, or to a member of a family of somebody in the military who says, fine, I hear you, Mr. Secretary, how do you know that Saddam Hussein and the people of Iraq would use these weapons against the United States in a way that jeopardizes my life, or my families lives?

RUMSFELD: First of all, the truth has a wonderful virtue, one can't know what can happen in the future. What you can do is try to connect the dots. You have a vicious dictator, who has already weaponized chemical and biological weapons, and already used them on their neighbors, and on their own people. They have killed thousands of their own people with chemical weapons, and they have used them against the Iranians. So, we know we have a leader who is a dictator, he's got the programs, who has a perfect willingness to use them. And then one looks at their rhetoric, what are they saying about their neighbors, what are they saying about the United States, why are they offering \$20,000 bonuses to the families of suicide bombers who blow up people in other countries in shopping malls and discotheque, and pizza parlors. Why do they do those things? Well, what kind of a threat does that pose?

If you were talking about a conventional capability, your standard of evidence would be one thing, you say, well, we can absorb that. If you're talking about an unconventional capability, one has to be very careful about saying you're going to absorb it.

LEHRER: But then somebody can come back to you and say, wait a minute, we had a deterrence thing with the Soviet Union for many, many years, and we had the capability of blowing them to smithereens, and they were doing the same to us, a lot more so than Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and it worked. We never took a preemptive strike against the Soviet Union.

RUMSFELD: Right. And that balance of terror, or mutual assured destruction did, in fact, work with the Soviet Union for a variety

of different reasons. It did not work for everything. It did not stop the Soviet Union from invading other countries, like Afghanistan. If we had a balance of terror, if you will, with Saddam Hussein, which is not our first choice. Our first choice is to prevent that, but if you had one, it wouldn't stop them from invading Kuwait again, or invading Saudi Arabia, which they were ready to do, or getting in another war with Iran, or attacking their other neighbors, or destroying Israel as they talk about every day in their rhetoric. It wouldn't stop them from that.

Furthermore, a balance of mutual assured destruction with the Soviet Union didn't stop the Korean War, it didn't stop the Vietnam War, it didn't stop a whole host of other things in the world. It was a limited deterrent effect. It was a limited constraint or containment policy, but it was never perfect.

Furthermore, the nexus between terrorist networks and a terrorist state with weapons of mass destruction, it's perfectly possible for Saddam Hussein to work with a terrorist network, arrange for them to have the biological weapons. They have sleeper cells around the world, and to use them without a return address. Suicide bombers are not deterred, they're proud. They think they're going to heaven. So the deterrent argument would be wonderful if there were something like that that worked. But it's so obviously fallacious.

LEHRER: No way to deter Saddam Hussein from using what he may or may not have?

RUMSFELD: Well, you know, one of the concerns about a conflict with Saddam Hussein is that he would use those weapons. The problem is, he can't do it himself. He needs others to do it, and I would think that the Iraqi military and the linkages he has to those weapons ought to be very, very careful about thinking about using them. The concern of the United States is those weapons. The concern of the United States is the regime at the top. And clearly people who would use those weapons are not going to have a happy future if, in fact, they do them.

LEHRER: A man asked me today while I was on an airplane coming back from Colorado, and a man said to me, wait a minute, we know about the Al-Qaeda terrorists, they've already killed Americans. Why don't we get rid of them first and then worry about the guy who might do something to us, Saddam Hussein. What would you say to him?

RUMSFELD: Well, the global war on terrorism is important, and this is a part of it. It is the nexus between an Al-Qaeda type network and other terrorist network and a terrorist state like Saddam Hussein who has those weapons of mass destruction. As we sit here, there are senior Al-Qaeda in Iraq. They are there. They are also in Iran. They are also in other countries. They're in Pakistan.

LEHRER: That can't separate them out is what you're saying, right?

RUMSFELD: Not from the air.

LEHRER: But, what I mean is going after Saddam Hussein is also going after Al-Qaeda, in a way?

RUMSFELD: It is clearly, if one deals with that problem in whatever way the president may decide, and he has not made a decision, except he said the choice we don't have is to do nothing, because time is on their side. With the Soviet Union time was on our side, going back to that deterrent analogy, we could wait, their economy was getting weaker and weaker, and weaker, and they were isolated, and finally it imploded. Time is not on our side here. He's got the oil revenues, he's buying additional weapons, he's moving his weapons of mass destruction programs forward, he's dealing with terrorists. And every week month and year that go on he's going to be more of a threat not less of a threat.

LEHRER: Speaking of time, there have been several stories in the last few days in the newspapers that you and your colleagues in the military are concerned about a military action against Iraq, because of the weather. It has to be before January or February, because things start to get too hot after that. Is that legit? Is that a problem?

RUMSFELD: I don't know that I want to get into that. Obviously there's lots of things that are more favorable at one moment than at another moment. There are so many considerations that go into it, certainly weather is one. But, I don't know that I'd want to differentiate among them particularly.

LEHRER: But, in terms of what's going on with the U.N. now, would you concede that at least what that letter did, we'll go back to where we started, the letter from Iraq, has slowed a process, or the process down. Does the inspector thing now have to be played out some way?

RUMSFELD: I don't know that it will prove to have slowed things down. I was with the president and Secretary Powell this morning when Colin briefed the National Security Council on what's taking place in the United Nations. And I didn't get the sense that either one of them were in a relaxed mode. They clearly are going to be moving forward with short timetables in the United Nations.

LEHRER: What about the diplomatic thing here? Do we, meaning the big we, the Western world or the world that's upset about all of this, not just the United States, have to call Iraq's bluff? If you think this is not real, and other people think this isn't real, does this bluff have to be called, and does that take time, does it slow things down, is that a legitimate course to take?

RUMSFELD: It depends on what credence one gives the moves that Iraq makes. I mean, here is a country that's violated every U.N. resolution that relates to it. It has lied, it has thrown the inspectors out. The idea that they're likely to be credible with respect to one more opportunity is, I think, debatable. And I think the problem the U.N. has is they have issued very tough resolutions year after year, after year, and they have never been implemented. Now, at some point an institution has to ask how does it feel about that, does it want to be irrelevant as an institution? Does it want to have relevance, or is it willing to simply keep making resolutions and having a dictator like Iraq tell the world community not to worry, you're irrelevant. I think the U.N. is facing an issue here, and I think the president put it very, very well before that institution. It is not a U.S. issue for the U.N., it's a U.N. resolution, it's a U.N. issue.

LEHRER: You don't think the offer of Iraq to readmit the inspectors kind of takes a little steam out of all of that? The French, several Arab nations, the Russians have already said, we don't think we need to do anything right now, no new resolutions, let's play this thing out with the inspectors. That's not a problem?

RUMSFELD: I don't doubt for a minute that Iraq and maybe some other countries would like to rope a dope it along, and just keep delaying things and putting it off. That's always the case. There's never unanimity on anything that I've seen, at least rarely. But, I think most countries are pretty wise and perceptive. The truth is that Saddam Hussein has been about four times as clever as the United States, the U.N., and the Western world in managing public opinion. They're just masters at manipulating the press, and putting out disinformation. They're already moving military units and elements next to mosques, and next to hospitals, and next to schools. So that --

RUMSFELD: Exactly, so they can claim that the coalition has done all these terrible things. It's an old pattern. I don't know what credence it will be given up in the U.N. Only time will tell. I know that Colin is working with the other countries, and a lot of them have been very forthright, and understand what's taking place.

LEHRER: Meanwhile, and finally, to your responsibilities as Secretary of Defense. Whenever a decision is made, whatever the decision is made by the president to do something, is the United States military ready to do anything on that scale of everything that's been discussed?

RUMSFELD: Absolutely.

LEHRER: Without question?

RUMSFELD: Without question.

LEHRER: We can do that and still keep going after Al-Qaeda, and do all of our other responsibilities?

RUMSFELD: Absolutely. The military leaders and the combatant commanders, and the services and I have all met repeatedly. We have a force sizing construct and a strategy that enables the United States of America to engage in two major conflicts, near simultaneously, to win decisively in one and occupy the country, to swiftly defeat in the other case and hold, and to simultaneously provide for homeland defense, and a series of lesser contingencies, such as Bosnia or Kosovo. And we have the capability to pursue the global war on terrorism, and certainly the problems of Iraq are part of the global war on terrorism as we've been doing.

LEHRER: So whatever the president decides, if it's a military decision on Iraq, you're prepared to do it, and do it whatever it is?

RUMSFELD: There is just no question about it. The United States military will be prepared to do whatever the president orders, and do it well.

LEHRER: Mr. Secretary, thank you.

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