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Rumsfeld Says Link Between Iraq, al Qaeda 'Not Debatable'

By Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

ATLANTA, Sept. 27, 2002 – Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said this morning the link between al Qaeda terrorists and Iraq is "accurate and not debatable."

Rumsfeld traveled here to discuss the on-going war on terrorism and the threat Iraq poses to the United States and its allies.

The secretary declined to give more details on the ties between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden. He said he does not want to give away intelligence information that may help the enemy.

Rumsfeld said he is not here to sell war with Iraq to the American people, noting that President Bush has made no decision on possible military action.

However, Rumsfeld said in interviews with local television stations, the president is pushing ahead with Congress on a resolution on Iraq. In addition, the president and Secretary of State Colin Powell are working with the United Nations Security Council to pass a resolution that calls on Iraq to disarm and live up to 16 UN resolutions in place after the Persian Gulf War.

The secretary described his current role as ensuring the Defense Department is prepared for whatever the president decides. "And we are (ready)," he said. "My job is to see that DoD is equipped and ready to handle whatever comes."

He said the department can handle a conflict with regime change as its goal, another "near simultaneous" conflict to defeat an enemy short of regime change, and still handle all lesser contingencies such as Kosovo, Bosnia and the call-up for operations like recent military activities in the Ivory Coast.

Rumsfeld also addressed preemption, the course of action at the heart of the new National Security Strategy. "Preemption recognizes that this is a different security environment than before," Rumsfeld said. In the past, the major threat was from conventional weapons. Today, rogue states could supply weapons of mass destruction to terror groups.

"How do you defend yourself against a terrorist?" Rumsfeld asked rhetorically. "Do you absorb the attack and then decide to do something about it?"

He said in the past, with conventional weapons, countries could afford to absorb a blow and lose hundreds or thousands of people. "Today, the question people are debating is how do you feel about absorbing a blow with a weapon of mass destruction, and it's not hundreds or thousands of people (killed), but it's tens of thousands?" he asked.

Rumsfeld cited President John F. Kennedy's actions during the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962. Kennedy did not allow the Soviet Union to place nuclear missiles in Cuba. He blockaded the island and, after some very tense negotiations, got the Soviets to withdraw the weapons. Rumsfeld described this as preemptive action.

Iraq has long been at the weapons of mass destruction business. Rumsfeld reiterated that Saddam has chemical and biological weapons and is striving for nuclear weapons.

He called the national debate and dialogue taking place in America as a very useful thing and said he hopes to encourage such debate. But, Rumsfeld said, President Bush firmly believes the dangers of not acting are greater than the dangers of acting.

He said all Americans should ask themselves the same tough questions the president has asked. Rumsfeld quoted the president as asking the American people, "Think about it. Use your own brain. Consider it. Ask questions."

"(The president) is saying, 'We're in a new security environment, think about, consider it, and draw your own conclusions,'" Rumsfeld said. "Weigh the risks of doing something, and then think carefully of the risks of not doing anything."

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