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Presenter: Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld

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DoD News Briefing - Secretary Rumsfeld And Gen. Pace

Thursday, Sept. 26, 2002 - 1:15 p.m. EDT.

(Also participating was Marine Corps Gen. Peter Pace, vice chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff.)

Rumsfeld: Good afternoon.

Q: Welcome home.

Rumsfeld: How you feeling?

Q: Not bad, thank you.

Rumsfeld: Good.

As several of you know, last night we returned from the NATO defense ministerial meetings in Warsaw, Poland. We discussed a wide range of issues with our friends in NATO, including a proposed NATO standing response force that would be able to deploy in days or weeks rather than months, the need for improved allied capabilities, and the need to streamline the NATO command structure, and the need to reduce waste by getting rid of unneeded NATO bases, commands and headquarters, the same kind of a process we've been going through here in the United States of getting ourselves rearranged for the 21st century.

The deputy director of Central Intelligence, John McLaughlin, presented a detailed briefing to the NATO defense ministers on the threat posed by Iraq, its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, and its ties to terrorists, and its connections to al Qaeda. His excellent presentation was preceded that morning by the release of the white paper or dossier that Tony Blair issued in London -- Prime Minister Blair.

Iraq, needless to say, is continuing to deny that it has weapons of mass destruction programs, or weapons of mass destruction, and is in the process of playing the international community along in New York. Our interest, as President Bush indicated, is compliance with U.N. resolutions and disarmament of Iraq's WMD programs and weapons.

General Pace.

Pace: Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Good afternoon. Yesterday coalition aircraft struck two air defense facilities in southern Iraq in response to our forces being fired on. They used precision guided munitions to strike Iraqi air defense facilities in two locations: in al Kufa, which is approximately 80 miles south of Baghdad, and al Basrah, which is approximately 245 miles southeast of Baghdad. These strikes were in self-defense.

In Afghanistan, U.S. Special Forces have uncovered yet another large weapons cache, this time in a suspected arms dealer compound near the town of Orgun in southeast Afghanistan, near the Pakistan border. They recovered large amounts of mortar rounds, artillery rounds, rockets, anti-personnel mines, heavy machine-gun ammunition and the like.

And with that, we'll take your questions.

Rumsfeld: Charlie?

Q: Mr. Secretary, Condi Rice was interviewed on television last night and she said that -- she said that al Qaeda had -- I believe she put it, "taken refuge" in Baghdad. And she also said that suspect al Qaeda captives had told the United States that al Qaeda has been trained by Iraq in how to make chemical weapons. Could you shed any light on either of those, including whether or not these al Qaeda in Baghdad might be senior al Qaeda?

Rumsfeld: The knowledge that the intelligence community, the shared intelligence information among the coalition members, has of the al Qaeda relationship with Iraq is evolving. It's based on a lot of different types of sources of varying degrees of reliability. Some of it, admittedly, comes from detainees, which has been helpful, and particularly some high-ranking detainees.

Since we began after September 11th, we do have solid evidence of the presence in Iraq of al Qaeda members, including some that have been in Baghdad. We have what we consider to be very reliable reporting of senior level contacts going back a decade, and of possible chemical and biological agent training. And when I say contacts, I mean between Iraq and al Qaeda. The reports of these contacts have been increasing since 1998. We have what we believe to be credible information that Iraq and al Qaeda have discussed safe haven opportunities in Iraq, reciprocal nonaggression discussions. We have what we consider to be credible evidence that al Qaeda leaders have sought contacts in Iraq who could help them acquire weapon of -- weapons of mass destruction capabilities. We do have -- I believe it's one report indicating that Iraq provided unspecified training relating to chemical and/or biological matters for al Qaeda members. There is, I'm told, also some other information of varying degrees of reliability that supports that conclusion of their cooperation.

Q: Are there any indications that senior al Qaeda are in Baghdad or Iraq?

Rumsfeld: I've -- I think I've -- the problem with it is that when intelligence is gathered, it's gathered at a moment, and then that moment passes, and then there's the next moment and the moment after that. We certainly have evidence of senior al Qaeda who have been in Baghdad in recent periods. Whether they're currently there or not one never knows, because they're moving targets.

Yeah?

Q: Mr. Secretary, are you even cleared to say that Saddam Hussein -- or there's no intelligence that you've seen that Saddam Hussein has a direct tie to September 11th?

Rumsfeld: I didn't address that.

Q: And I'm asking that. Do you -- have you seen any or is there any intelligence that Saddam Hussein has any ties to September 11th?

Rumsfeld: I think I've probably said what I'd like to say about al Qaeda and Iraq.

Q: Mr. Secretary, can we follow up on that just a little bit? Much of the criticism, congressional and others, domestically and overseas, is that neither you nor the president have proven the case, so to speak, about a possible attack on Iraq. Do you know something that we don't know, that perhaps you're not willing to share with us -- but do you know possibly --

Rumsfeld: I hope so! (Laughter.)

Q: We hope so, too. But do you know of direct linkage between Saddam Hussein and the use of weapons of mass destruction -- (inaudible) -- elsewhere? And further than what you just told us, do you know of any direct linkage between him and the al Qaeda you're not able to share with us?

Rumsfeld: Look, the -- I think it's very important for people to think what's taking place right now in the Congress. They're trying to connect the dots after -- what happened before September 11th and how could that information have been pieced together and fashioned into a picture, a road map that said September 11th is coming. It is enormously difficult to do it a year after it happened. It's vastly more difficult to do it before something happens. And the task we have is to try to take all of these pieces of information and draw conclusions that are in the interests of the American people and the people of the world.

It is not possible to find hard evidence that something is going to happen two, four, six, eight months or a year down the road. You will have known it happened after it happens. And when you're dealing with weapons of mass destruction and you're dealing with countries like Iraq that have used weapons of mass destruction, and countries like Iraq that have active development programs for those weapons, and have weaponized chemical and biological weapons, you have to recognize that there are -- that the evidence piles up. Now, can anyone -- will be always able to say, even after the fact, that there isn't

sufficient evidence, that you don't have proof beyond a reasonable doubt. You'll know an event occurred, but even after it occurs, it's very difficult to get perfect evidence.

Our goal is not to go into a court of law and try to prove something to somebody. Prime Minister Blair put out a white paper on this issue. The president of the United States went to the United Nations. Members of the House and Senate have been briefed extensively on this set of issues. And in every case, it is a puzzle. It is the task of taking these disparate pieces and putting them together so that people can make their own judgment, not for us to prove anything. What they have to do is they have to say what does a reasonable person conclude are the risks from this? Are the risks greater of the U.N., for example, trying to enforce their resolution, or are the risks greater of not doing that? Always there are risks on both sides.

Yes?

QMr. Secretary, in making that evaluation, one of the things allies might want is a little more information about the sources on that. Are you sharing any of that with them --

Rumsfeld: Sure.

Q: -- in your presentations to NATO and elsewhere?

Rumsfeld: Sure. Mr. -- John McLaughlin gave a very detailed and excellent briefing to our NATO allies, and other countries that are not in NATO have been briefed as well.

Bob?

Q: Could you bring us up to date on the state of play on Pentagon planning for training -- providing military training to Iraqi opposition members, in terms of the numbers or notification to Congress and so forth?

Rumsfeld: General Pace can.

Pace: Thank you, sir.

Rumsfeld: He's been in town; I've been out.

Pace: As you would expect, we're looking at all the military options that, if we're called upon to do something in Iraq or elsewhere in the world, that we can present to the leadership of our country. One of the things to look at is the opportunity to take opposition forces and assist them in their training. So we are looking at that as an option. We have not briefed the secretary on that yet. And when we're ready to bring forward to him a plan that we think is a reasonable option to pick if he wants to, we'll do that.

Q: Is this training that would be in offensive operations or would it be for support functions?

Pace: We'll look at the whole spectrum of military operations and see what we think is reasonable to be able to accomplish in the time available and make recommendations on a spectrum of things so we can pick at the right time what is appropriate, if anything is appropriate.

Q: What do you think the timetable should be? And how soon are you going to --

Pace: We are going to have a time line that goes from today through a couple of years from now, and we will just lay that out and have this available and be able to talk to the secretary when he needed that.

Q: Mr. Secretary, is the information that you have told us about this morning new? And why is the administration, in a very orchestrated pattern, putting this out now?

Rumsfeld: I've been out of town and I don't know anything about an orchestrated pattern. All I know is I was asked questions when I walked in here, so I responded. If that's an orchestra, it's a funny orchestra --

Q: Condi Rice said it last night, Ari Fleischer said it a few minutes ago, and you were using almost exactly the same words. So there's --

Rumsfeld: Yeah. Well, the way that happens -- first of all, with respect to the first part of your question, much of the information is not new. Some is, some isn't. It is cumulative. It keeps coming along as interrogations take place.

And second, before I left town to do the briefing in Europe, I asked what portions of these things that we know might be appropriate to declassify and would no longer cause any harm to anybody if they were made public. And the words that I've used are basically the response I got to my request, and which I used with our NATO allies on an unclassified basis.

Q: The words are very carefully chosen, and I wonder if we can go over some of them. You said that there was --

Rumsfeld: Think if they were poorly chosen! (Laughter.)

Q: Carefully chosen. You said there was one report, a single source, of unspecified training by al Qaeda of some kind of chemical weapons training.

Rumsfeld: Yeah.

Q: In the world of journalism, one source, unspecified type of training is highly unspecified.

Rumsfeld: Yeah, don't print it. (Laughter.)

Q: But you're obviously trying to make a political point with this --

Rumsfeld: No I'm not.

Q: -- but it doesn't seem --

Rumsfeld: No I'm not. I'm responding to your questions.

Q: Well, you're laying out --

Rumsfeld: I walk in and I get asked a question.

Q: You're laying out what you say are specifics, but it's very, very vague. Is there more specific intelligence to back up --

Rumsfeld: Well, sure.

Q: -- a single source of unspecified type of training?

Rumsfeld: Well, sure. I know who the source is.

Q: Do you know what the specific kind of training is without telling us?

Rumsfeld: That I'm not -- I don't have high confidence in, because --

Q: Do you have more than one source that indicates this, that you can't reveal to us?

Rumsfeld: On that particular matter -- (pauses) -- yes.

Q: And on one of your other issues, you say there's credible information that Iraq and al Qaeda have discussed safe haven, the issue of safe haven.

Rumsfeld: Right.

Q: Is Iraq providing al Qaeda safe haven?

Rumsfeld: I guess that's a question of semantics. I --

Q: Just to talk about it doesn't mean you do it, I guess.

Rumsfeld: That's possible, although we know there are al Qaeda in the country, and we know they've discussed with Iraq safe haven. Now whether the ones that are in the country are there under some sort of grant of safe haven or not is -- happens to be a piece of intelligence that either we don't have or we don't want to talk about.

Q: You also said, Mr. Secretary --

Rumsfeld: Do you follow me? Wait a second --

Q: Yeah, I follow you. I mean, it's -- what you're creating is an innuendo by this, rather than flatly --

Rumsfeld: No, no, what we're doing is we're -- we're saying is, in response to questions and an enormous appetite on this subject, we're trying to be very, very careful about saying what we think we can say that is useful to the public, not inaccurate, precisely phrased and defensible, without compromising sources or methods.

Now that's not something people just get up and blurt out a bunch of words about.

Q: (Off mike.)

Rumsfeld: So when Ari Fleischer uses words that are quite similar to those that we've cleared, one ought not to be surprised, and -- nor should one say it's an orchestration or a symphony or an opera or anything else.

Q: Mr. Secretary, Mr. Secretary, could I follow up, please?

Q: (Off mike) -- about -- on the one point, you said, I think, that you have solid evidence of the presence of al Qaeda in Iraq, including some in Baghdad. And when you said that, I wasn't clear what time frame you were referring to, whether or not that is current. Do you currently believe they're in Baghdad, or are you only talking about al Qaeda in the North in Kurdish-controlled areas?

Rumsfeld: Specifically not, with respect to the last part of your question. We're not only talking about al Qaeda in the northern part.

Q: So you currently believe there are al Qaeda in Saddam Hussein-controlled areas.

Rumsfeld: I thought I said it precisely the way I wanted to. I can't know whether, as we sit here talking, the information that was accurate when we got it is still accurate today.

Q: Understood --

Rumsfeld: But if you're asking, is it current, in the last period of days or weeks, the answer is yes.

Q: Okay. That is what I was asking. I'm sorry I wasn't clear. So it's not 10 years old. As you say, some of your information goes back --

Rumsfeld: More than a year old. More than six months old.

Q: Mr. Secretary, in fact, you said --

Q: And let me follow up on -- very quickly, then -- I'm sorry. When you lay out this -- does this in your mind, everything you've said here so far today, add to the bill of particulars against Iraq? In other words, so far you have talked about regime change in this administration as a result of their failure to comply with U.N. resolutions and their WMD programs. Does their sheltering of al Qaeda and providing this harboring to al Qaeda now add to the bill of particulars? Does this become one of the reasons for regime change beyond what you've already stated?

Rumsfeld: You say that we've talked about regime change in this administration, but the fact is it's been the statutory policy of the United States government since 1998, in the prior administration, the prior Congress -- three congresses ago. And the prior administration adopted that as the policy. This president has accepted that. And --

Q: But given the fact that it's his policy as well, does this -- does this evidence pointed out today add to the bill of particulars?

Rumsfeld: Well, I suppose the answer's yes. It wouldn't be something one would want in their background sheet suggesting they're model citizens. I mean, are you saying does it help Iraq's image in the world to be providing haven for al Qaeda, or does it hurt it.

Q: No, sir. I'm sorry. What I'm really asking is, you've laid out evidence of their sheltering of al Qaeda. Now regime change has been discussed because they're not, in your view, obeying U.N. resolutions. Are you now pursuing regime change in addition because they are sheltering al Qaeda? Is this another reason for it?

Rumsfeld: Ah, oh, well, gee, I don't know. That would be up to the president and the Congress, who are working resolutions in the U.N. and -- I mean --

Q: You have no opinion on the matter?

Rumsfeld: Well, I certainly do not think that it recommends somebody very highly, a country very highly if they are providing haven for al Qaeda. It just -- it is not something you'd want on your background sheet.

Q: Mr. Secretary, if the U.S. had solid information that al Qaeda members were in Iraq and you knew where they were, will U.S. forces strike immediately?

Rumsfeld: You know -- (chuckles) -- I guess -- I guess the answer is probably no. These people are not in large concentrations of thousands or hundreds. They're in populated areas. They make a practice of being near civilian hospitals and mosques and things like that. How would you strike immediately without doing just enormous damage? I mean, that's

one of the great advantages that terrorists have, is they can live in cities, they can live in mountains, they can operate on border areas, they can function in ungoverned areas. They have a lot of advantages.

Q: Do we have any restraints right now about attacking Iraq right now? I mean, what if they weren't in cities? What if they were out in an open area? Would we have restraints simply because we're not ready to go?

Rumsfeld: Oh, I see what you're saying. Well, I mean, we fired some response options this week. So, I mean, if there are things going on that -- we were -- our aircraft were fired at and we fired on some radars that existed there -- (to General Pace) as I recall, there were radars?

Pace: Correct, sir.

Rumsfeld: I guess -- I don't know that I want to go into what we would do if we happened to see a single individual who was high value wandering around in the Iraqi desert away from the population.

You had a question. I'm sorry.

Q: Yes. You said earlier, we certainly have evidence of senior al Qaeda in Baghdad. Can you identify for us today who those senior al Qaeda in Baghdad may be, if they're still there?

Rumsfeld: I could, but I won't.

Q: Are they sufficiently senior, to the level of Osama bin Laden, Ayman Zawahiri? Are they in the top 10? Top 15? When you say senior, how do you --

Rumsfeld: Oh, gosh. I don't -- clearly, it's not Osama bin Laden, if that's what you're asking.

Q: Are they in the top 10? The top what?

Rumsfeld: Oh, I don't know. I'd have to go back and get the latest list. They're people of interest.

Tom?

Q: And since you -- I have a follow-up. Since you were willing to lay out some of the particulars about the presence of al Qaeda in Iraq, are you willing to tell us what evidence U.S. has of al Qaeda in Iran in recent intelligence --

Rumsfeld: You know, I've been talking about this for weeks. There are al Qaeda in Iran! There are a lot of al Qaeda in Iran. Iran is providing haven. And they're telling their people they're not! The government is. And they're not telling their people the truth. And they are there. And they do not like it when we say that. But they are.

Q: And what can you tell us about recent U.S. intelligence --

Rumsfeld: (Inaudible) -- fourth question.

Q-- which has detected certainly what appears to be a new terrorist training camp in far eastern Iran?

Rumsfeld: There are terrorist training camps in a variety of countries. They -- this has been going on for some time. Some are quite sophisticated, some are much less so. They can be bombed and blown up and be back in business in three weeks. The problem is not so much terrorist training camps, it's a country that provides a haven for terrorists so that they can train on a continuing basis, and so forth. And that is notably unhelpful.

I have no idea -- I should -- I'm going to stop.

Tom?

Q: I want to return to the question of preemption, if I could. In the new national security strategy, and also in your testimony last week up on the Hill, the word preemption and prevention was used almost interchangeably. But as a matter of military doctrine, and of international practice, there is a distinction. I was curious if in this current threat environment you see that distinction blurring? And when we talk about Iraq, although no decision's been made, do you see it as a preemptive war against an imminent threat or a preventive war to keep them from becoming a greater threat?

Rumsfeld: I would have to go get my dictionary and talk to some experts on international law. You're right, there are differences in those words and their meanings and their historical use. And I may be a bit sloppy in using them somewhat interchangeably. I often use more than one, and the reason I do is for -- is to try to add dimension to what people are hearing.

I mean, if you think about it, defense is one word, and you can do that in a variety of different ways. Everyone agrees that self-defense is legitimate, legal, domestically, internationally, and it's accepted. The concept of anticipatory self-defense is also something that goes back historically a long time. People have always preferred to have battles take place not on their real estate, but on somebody else's real estate. And as they see things developing, they have attempted to stop them before they actually adversely affected their population and their real estate.

Prevention is also -- has a connotation that's somewhat more acceptable than preemption. It sounds a little fairer -- if there is such a word; that you're trying to prevent something from happening at the last minute is the implication -- the connotation of that word to me.

Preemption is slightly different in the sense that it suggest that you have reason to believe something's going to happen, could happen, that is notably unpleasant, and you make a conscious decision to go out and stop that from happening.

Now, what would you call the Cuban missile crisis action by President Kennedy? In my view, establishing what he called a quarantine, what the world thought of as a blockade, and preventing, if you will, the Soviet Union from placing nuclear missiles in Cuba, that was certainly self-defense, it was certainly anticipatory self-defense, it was certainly preventative, and we were very close to a crisis of historic proportion. And I think it's not unfair or inaccurate to say that he took a preemptive -- he engaged in preemption.

Q: Mr. Secretary?

Q: Secretary, just to clarify one thing on John's question about why now with these details. Yesterday you were asked about a connection between al Qaeda and Iraq, you said, "Oh certainly, there is." And then, for more details, you said, "It's unhelpful to get into a lot of detail because it just changes our capabilities of doing things." Yet today --

Rumsfeld: It does.

Q: You know, why today with the specifics on some of these details?

Rumsfeld: I didn't give any details. I gave a very, very carefully phrased set of sentences that I had previously suggested to the intelligence community they might want to consider concluding that they no longer need to be classified. Turns out I was close to right, and there they are, and they're not terribly different from what I said previously. They do have the benefit of being -- having been thought through and not off the top of someone's head.

Q: What changed between yesterday and today, though, that you're allowed to --

Rumsfeld: I arrived home.

Q: And Condoleezza Rice --

Q: And it was waiting for you on your desk?

Rumsfeld: Yeah, I asked a week ago. I talked to the intelligence community over a week ago and I said, "Here are a set of things that look to me like it would be a useful way to demystify this." And it came back, you know, three-quarters saying, "Fine, not going to be a problem." So it was there on my desk when I got back. And think of it as anticipatory self-defense. (Laughter.)

Q: Mr. Secretary?

Q: Did you ask them to review the other quarter?

Q: Mr. Secretary, since the relationship between al Qaeda and Iraq apparently goes back a decade, does the evidence point to an Iraqi role in the first World Trade Center attack in 1997?

Rumsfeld: I'm not going to get into it.

Q: Mr. Secretary, on these strikes on Iraq, both you and General Pace, if you could both respond -- of course, as you know, Iraq was saying this is on a civilian center. I wonder if you just respond about the difficulty and moving -- mobile air defenses near civilian areas and how you would respond.

Rumsfeld: Let me tell you a problem I have. I'm going to be off by an hour or two. But for the sake of argument, a international wire service -- (pause; laughter) -- early this morning -- and I'd have forgotten whether it's our time or somebody else's time, but I think it's our time -- say, for the sake of argument, plus or minus 6 o'clock -- gets a report out of Baghdad, "Americans are bombing and killing civilians, and what a terrible thing it is," runs it. Bang -- it goes out there on the wire.

How many outlets are connected to that wire service? Hundreds. Hundreds. Bang, it gets printed. Hour later, Iraqi -- Baghdad says, "Civilian casualties, bombing, bad stuff, and the United States still hasn't commented" -- something like that. This is close enough for government work. (Isolated laugh.) Hundreds and hundreds of outlets get that and print it and run it and put it on television and so forth and so on.

It's not true! It isn't true! How do you do that? How do you catch up with all of those people who read that? How do you --

Q: What were those --

Q: (Off mike) -- provide the information I can sort about his --

Q: What was inferred?

(Murmur from reporters.)

Rumsfeld: It's just -- go ahead. It was what he already explained. It's the attacks -- the response options in Iraq. It was not true that we killed a bunch of civilian people.

Q: You bombed a radar, though.

Rumsfeld: Well, sure; that isn't killing civilian people.

(Cross talk.)

Q: Actually, I was asking --

(Cross talk.)

Rumsfeld: It's a dual-use airport.

Q: And that story also quotes somebody from right down the hall here, saying that it is not true, that it was a military radar hit at a civilian airfield.

Q: Sir -- (inaudible) -- three-and-a-half hours.

Pace: The al Basrah --

Rumsfeld: Three-and-a-half hours with the wrong stories going out all over the globe.

Pace: The al-Basra --

Rumsfeld: But don't be defensive, Charlie. I mean --

Q: Mr. Secretary, you never did really reply. Could you just set the record straight on that?

Q: Let me answer the question -- (inaudible).

Rumsfeld: Sure.

Q: May I answer?

Rumsfeld: You bet! (Laughter.)

Q: Both of you.

Pace: Al-Basra is an airfield that's used both by civilian aircraft and by military aircraft, by the Iraqis. The radar site that was struck was on the military side of the field and, in fact, way off the end of the military side of the field. When you take a look at the picture of this, it is out in, basically, desert. There were no civilian activities. There were no civilian airplanes at that airfield when that was struck. And the only reason anybody would be out in this vicinity of this particular radar at any time of day would be to actually be functioning as a part of that radar team. So we did strike the radar. It was a military target. It was way away from any civilian activity. And therein is a kernel of the truth about it being a dual use facility, but it was not a -- it was not a dual use target. And there were certainly no civilians at the time.

Q: I want to take the opportunity to say it might be helpful if Central Command Public Affairs could be encouraged to respond more fully to us when we do call them about these matters. I just bring that up as a point of administrative --

Rumsfeld: The question I first asked was none of the questions you're asking. I said, "Did we get it? Did we destroy it?" That's what I'm interested in.

Q: What was the answer? (Laughter.)

Pace: The answers are still too --

Rumsfeld: Too soon to know.

Pace: Too soon to know the answer to the questions. CENTCOM's looking at it.

Rumsfeld: No, you have to wait for the after -- the battle damage report.

Q: (Off mike) -- surveillance? What kind of radar?

Pace: Target.

Q: General, as a matter of course now, are coalition aircraft going after command and control instead of just those radars that are targeting coalition aircraft?

Pace: When the coalition aircraft are attacked by the ground systems, that system consists of the missiles or the, you know, triple-A guns, the radars that help vector them onto target, the communications links that connect those radars to the command and control nodes, the command and control node itself, and then the linkages between that command and control node and the bosses above that, and the bosses above that. All of those linkages, both on the missile side of the house and on the aircraft side of the house for the Iraqis, are within the target set of proper response for when our coalition aircraft are fired upon. And the commanders at the time determine which of those -- which part of that targets that they're going to attack at that particular time.

Rumsfeld: You know what we ought to do? We ought to go back to Afghanistan, and second, go back to the Gulf War. And we ought to have an off-the-record seminar on all the ways that the Iraqis lied during Desert Storm, and how they moved their military equipment next to mosques and schools and hospitals and orphanages, and how they -- we've got -- I don't know if it's public or not, but you've got all kinds of intelligence information of how they sit down and figure out how they're going to dupe the world; how they're going to put out information that will be fundamentally damaging to the United States of America and to anyone opposing them, and fool the media. And they do it over and over and over. Much of that is probably unclassified at this stage, from the Desert Storm. There's some of it from Afghanistan that's unclassified, although less. And we are already seeing classified information as to how they have people assigned to do this, active networks, how they go about this. Now I just think it might be useful for everyone to sit down, take a look at all that.

Q: Why does --

Rumsfeld: You might want to call that a preemptive strike.

Q: Why all --

Q: Are they moving systems into populated areas now?

Rumsfeld: Oh, sure.

Q: And are you able to go after them?

Rumsfeld: We're not in conflict. If you're talking about Iraq --

Q: I'm talking about Iraq, yeah.

Rumsfeld: -- most of what they've got that's high value is in the Baghdad area, and we don't go in there.

Q: Mr. Secretary, on that topic, a related question is how they move around their chemical and biological weapons. And I wonder, given all this evidence that you've talked about today and the connection with al Qaeda and so on, and their ability to hide these things, is the time past when inspections by the U.N. would be of any use?

Rumsfeld: I guess that's a judgment that the folks negotiating up in New York will have to come to a conclusion on.

Yes? Well, but -- two questions. (Inaudible.)

Q: Going back to Tom's question on preemption, this building is now in the process of working a national military strategy.

And I'm wondering how that concept fits in --

Rumsfeld: What is that about? National -- working a national military strategy?

Q: That comes from the national security strategy.

Rumsfeld: Oh, we did that before the national security strategy.

Q: But they work in -- they --

Rumsfeld: They fit -- ours fits under it.

Q: I'm wondering how -- this notion of preemption is new and makes what the military does, what the Pentagon does, have to think differently. Does it change what the CINCs have to do in terms of assessing their areas of responsibility? Does it -- how does it fit in, in terms of doctrine, in terms of what the military has to do?

Rumsfeld: I'll have to think about that. We had -- did not -- do not have plans to revise our national security -- national defense strategy that fits under the national security strategy. We -- any -- when you're dealing terrorists and terrorist networks that can attack at any time, at any place, using any technique, you know before you start that you can't defend against that. Therefore, you have no choice. The only way to provide for your defense is to anticipate and deal with the capabilities that have the advantage of striking you any time, any place, using any technique.

So we knew that last year. We're not going to have to change anything that I know of.

Pace: No. Plus if I'm a commander in the field, you expect me to be taking a look at the intelligence that's available and determine for myself the threat. And the threat is a combination of what capability does this nation or entity have and what's their intent with that capability. And if I, as a commander in the field, believe that that poses a threat to my forces or to my nation, you would expect that I would be doing my homework, my planning, to be able to address that, should the civilian leadership of the country determine that something should be done. So you do that kind of planning ahead of time, whether or not it's a, quote, "preemptive" or "preventive" event at the end of the day.

Q: General Pace?

Rumsfeld: Pam? Pam?

Q: General Pace, can you give us some flavor of --

Rumsfeld: Pam?

Just a second.

Q: On the Hill today, Richard Perle, the chairman of the Defense Policy Board, opined as to how if there are inspections, he doesn't believe that they could be sufficiently intrusive to force Iraq to disarm. They most likely will turn up very little, or nothing, and therefore -- and this is my question -- he believes it would make it even more difficult for the United States to assemble any kind of a coalition to go after Iraq. Do you share that belief, that inspections go in and find nothing, the U.S. will have an even more difficult time in rallying international support?

Rumsfeld: I would have to read the whole context of what he said in response to what. And I'm disinclined to get into it. I don't know enough about what he was asked to --

Q: Well, in your opinion, if inspections -- if an inspection team goes in now and finds nothing because perhaps Iraq is very good at hiding it, or perhaps they have nothing, but you all are of the belief that they have it, if they find nothing, does it make your job more difficult in trying to assemble an international coalition to disarm him by other means?

Rumsfeld: Goodness gracious! That is kind of like looking down the road for every conceivable possible you can find, and then driving into it. I just don't -- I don't get up in the morning and ask myself that.

We know they have weapons of mass destruction. We know they have active programs. There isn't any debate about it. So -- so the idea that if you had an appropriate inspection regime, that they'd come back and say you were wrong is -- is so far beyond anyone's imagination that it's not something I think about. If you have an appropriate inspection regime, they're going to find weapons of mass destruction, or else they're going to get thrown out, or else they're going to be denied access and they're going to leave themselves, because they're there.

Q: But if it's not an appropriate inspections regime, if it's not large enough, if it's not intrusive enough?

Rumsfeld: Well, then the United Nations obviously would have made a decision that it was comfortable not having its resolutions obeyed or adhered to or respected.

Q: Can General Pace give us some flavor --

Rumsfeld: And that would be not a -- that would be an important signal in the world about the United Nations, it seems to me.

Excuse me.

Q: Can General Pace give us some flavor for the meeting this morning, the Joint Chiefs and the president over at the White House -- subject, whatever?

Pace: We meet periodically with the president of the United States, and those are very private conversations between the commander in chief and his Joint Chiefs. And I'll leave it there.

Q: Would it be a mistake to say the subject of Iraq came up at that meeting?

Pace: It would be a mistake for me to craft this in any other terms other than to say that on occasion the president of the United States asks for our advice, and when he does, we give it to him.

Rumsfeld: It was a good meeting.

Q: Could I --

Q: (Off mike) -- ask for your advice.

Pace: Absolutely.

Q: Could I ask a question on another topic? If the United States gets involved --

Rumsfeld: Other than Iraq?! No one would know how to behave. (Laughter.)

Q: I'll let you be the judge as to whether it's on Iraq. If the United States gets involved in a military conflict that the government of Germany doesn't want to participate in -- (laughter -- can the United States --

Rumsfeld: Stirring the pot. (Laughter.) He just likes to stir it up.

Q: Can the United States use the military bases that we have in Germany, or can the German government forbid them?

Rumsfeld: There are all kinds of agreements and understandings and written SOFAs, status-of-forces agreements, as to what a country can do and what they can't do, and that's all been worked out over many years.

Q: Well, is it an issue, given the current situation?

Rumsfeld: Not to my knowledge.

Q: When you're in a hole, quit digging. (Laughter.)

Q: General Pace, is the military mission over in the Ivory Coast now? Are the troops going to leave the Ivory Coast and Ghana, or are they going to stay for a while?

Pace: It is not clear that that mission's complete yet. There's great cooperation between the U.S. forces under the U.S.-European Command and the French forces that are there. We are working in support of -- the U.S. military is working in support of U.S. State Department, so we need to defer the specific questions to them. But there are about 300 official U.S. citizens in that country, about 2,300 other U.S. citizens in that country, the vast majority of whom are safe right now. But we will continue to work with our U.S. ambassador through the State Department to provide the kind of support that they should need.

Q: (Off mike) -- or just standing by to see what happens?

Pace: There have been some U.S. citizens who have been moved. The students who were in the school, with the assistance of the French, were moved out of there yesterday. They spent the night in a secure location and some of them went to Ghana today via U.S. military transportation. Others, by choice, stayed in the Ivory Coast.

Q: Would you term that as --

Rumsfeld: But that's because they were in a specific location where there was some civil strife. The answer to your question is no, the State Department has made no decisions that I know of with --

Q: And no other Americans are at risk at the moment.

Rumsfeld: Well, we're not in the country. We can't say that. But nothing that would have caused the Department of State to have altered their status, that I know of.

Q: How would you --

Rumsfeld: Thank you very much. Good to see you all.

Q: See you tomorrow!

Rumsfeld: Come on!

Q: (Laughs.)

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