

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH SECRETARY OF DEFENSE DONALD RUMSFELD

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MR. SALANT: Good afternoon and welcome to the National Press Club. I'm Jonathan Salant, a reporter from Bloomberg News and president of the National Press Club. I'd like to welcome club members and their guests in the audience today, as well as those watching on C-SPAN. Please hold your applause during the speech so we have time for as many questions as possible. To our broadcast audience, I'd like to explain that if you do hear applause, it is from the guests and the members of the general public who attend our lunches, not from the working press.

The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by ConnectLive and is available to members only through the National Press Club website at www.press.org. Press Club members can also get free transcripts of our lunches on our Web site. Nonmembers may buy transcripts, audiotapes and videotapes by calling 1-888-343-1940. For more information about joining the Press Club, please call us at area code 202-662-7511.

Before introducing our head table, I would like to remind our members of future speakers. On February 7th, Douglas Wilder, the mayor of Richmond, Virginia and former governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia. He's the chairman of the board of the National Slavery Museum. He will discuss *Confronting the Issue of Slavery: The Unexplored Chapter of American History*. On February 14th, Marc Morial, the president of the National Urban League. On February 16th, actor Richard Dreyfuss will address Hollywood's view of today's media.

If you have any questions for our speaker, please write them on the card provided at your table and pass them up to me. I will ask as many as time permits. Right now I'll introduce the head table. Please hold your applause until their names are called and we'll ask each guest to stand briefly when their names are called.

On your right, Jim Crawley (ph), the defense reporter for Media General; Otto Critia, defense and national security reporter for Copley News Service; Ann Roosevelt, ground sources reporter for Defense Daily; Dis Sanans (ph), defense correspondent for Bloomberg News and coach of the National Press Club softball team -- (laughter) -- Ron Dagen, the Washington correspondent for the Kuwait News Agency and a member of the Press Club Speakers Committee; John Staos, also known as Sergeant Shaft, reporter for the Washington Times and a member of the club's Speakers Committee; Mary French (ph), the editor-in-chief of Army Magazine; John Hughes, my colleague at Bloomberg News and chairman of the Press Club speaker committee; Greg Gordon of the Minneapolis Star Tribune and the speaker committee luncheon organized -- committee member who organized today's luncheon -- and Greg, thank you very much; Rick Dunham, White House correspondent for Business Week and the immediate past president of the National Press Club; Alita Baldure, the Pentagon reporter for the Associate Press; Jim Rosen, national security correspondent from McClachy newspapers; Captain Esceeba (ph), Washington correspondent for the Milwaukee Journal and a member of the Press Club's Speakers Committee; and John Donnelly, a defense reporter with Congressional Quarterly and treasurer and the -- (inaudible) -- secretary of the National Press Club. (Applause.)

Today's speaker has two distinctions. He was the youngest Defense secretary in history. He was also oldest Defense secretary in history. (Laughter.) Donald Rumsfeld, a Navy veteran, first took over the Pentagon under President Gerald Ford. A quarter century later, he returned to the post under President George W. Bush.

The second time around, Secretary Rumsfeld was determined to transform the U.S. military to a lighter, more agile fighting force that could hit targets from long distances with precision weapons. He was willing to take on entrenched interests and scrap huge weapons programs whose value had diminished and then came 9/11. In the ensuing five years, Secretary Rumsfeld oversaw the war on terror and the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. Today the Taliban no longer control Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein is in prison rather than a Baghdad palace.

Secretary Rumsfeld has become the administration's lightning rod for criticism over the conduct of the Iraq war, which has cost more than 2,000 American lives and the death of tens of thousands of Iraqis. A poll has suggested Secretary Rumsfeld resign. Critics accuse him and other Bush administration officials of coming to office determined to invade Iraq and then exaggerating the evidence to justify the war. While U.S. forces made short work of the Iraqi

Army and toppled Saddam, Secretary Rumsfeld has been criticized for not sending enough troops to win the peace. Also under his watch, U.S. troops have been accused of mistreating prisoners. The secretary notes the progress being made in Iraq from the country's first free election to their homegrown security forces. Iraqis, he said recently, are more upbeat about their country and on the road to democracy.

Secretary Rumsfeld first entered public service at age 30 when he was elected to the House of Representatives. He became friends with three men who went onto bigger and better things -- Bob Dole, Gerald Ford and George Herbert Walker Bush. That's two presidents and a presidential nominee -- not bad company to be in. He left Congress and joined the Nixon administration in 1969 and later served as U.S. ambassador to the NATO. He returned to Washington in 1974 after President Nixon resigned due to the Watergate scandal. He was chief of staff under President Ford before moving across the Potomac River to the Pentagon.

In 1977 he was awarded the nation's highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom. He's also had a successful career in the private sector. Do you use Nutrasweet? Secretary Rumsfeld ran GD Searle & Company when it received government approval to sell the artificial sweetener.

Mr. Secretary, it is a sweet pleasure to welcome you to the National Press Club. (Applause.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: I don't know whether to thank him or comment on the introduction. In a sense, he made me sound like I can't hold a job. (Laughter.)

It's nice to see these folks at the head table, so many of whom are national security or defense reporters and journalists. Before I begin, I'd like to say that recently we've been reminded of the dangers that journalists face when covering combat. Reporters, of course, have been kidnaped, they've been injured and each is in our prayers.

I'm reminded of a corridor in the Pentagon that pays tribute to journalists -- down near the public affairs office. It recognizes that an informed citizenry is essential to democracy and that the reporters who inform the American people about the United States military and their activities make a valuable contribution to the nation. They certainly deserve our gratitude and our thanks.

This capital city of Washington, D.C. is filled with energetic and industrious free people. Free societies prosper, of course, because generally speaking, we can kind of trust one another to obey laws and we all seem to have similar values and want the best for our families and our country. We go to work and our children go to school with a high confidence that we'll all get home safely at the end of the day, and that's not true, of course, in many countries of the world.

But on September 11th, 2001, it called into question that trust and that confidence. Fifty-two months have passed since 19 men checked into hotels near Boston, New York and Washington. They carried airline tickets and box cutters and they waited patiently for the morning of September 11th, 2001. For a long time after that, Americans worried about flying, they worried about riding a subway, sending their youngsters to schools. Those of us in the Pentagon that day, of course, felt the plane hit the Pentagon and smelled the fire and the thick smoke and probably

everyone in this room on one occasion or another has watched the startling collapse of the World Trade Center and heard the final brave words of those aboard the aircraft over Pennsylvania.

We knew instinctively that the only way we could protect our way of life would be to take the fight to the terrorists. And though we made considerable progress in the years since September 11th, the enemy -- while weakened and under great pressure to be sure -- is still capable of global reach, still possesses the determination to kill more Americans and is still trying to do so with increasingly powerful weapons.

Today I want to talk about the war that's being waged and discuss the nature of the enemy we face and about the way ahead for us and probably for a generation to follow. One way to begin is to note how different this war is from others in the past. There's no draft. There are no war bonds, no victory gardens. The movies don't start with a newsreel showing the latest activities in the war as they did during World War II when I was a young man. Newspapers don't carry maps every day showing the latest allied activity.

Because of the differences in this struggle, there's not the same sense of immediacy as there was in other wars. It's not, to many people, as personal. Yet, the threat today may well prove to be more dangerous than any our country has faced. I say that because the weapons available today are vastly more powerful and more dangerous. We know that the enemy is unrelenting, its attacks indiscriminate, its motivations evil.

Compelled by an militant ideology that celebrates murder and suicide with no territory to defend, with little to lose, they will either succeed in changing our way of life or we'll succeed in changing theirs. Listen to some of their voices.

In 1998, Osama bin Laden called the murder of Americans, quote, "an individual duty of every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible" unquote. Bin Laden's lieutenant Zawahiri warned, quote, "All Americans in New York and Washington, the losses you are having in Afghanistan and Iraq are only the losses of the initial clashes" unquote. And in the U.K., shortly after the 2005 London bombings, a cleric there said, quote "I would like to see the Islamic flag fly not only over Number 10 Downing Street, but over the whole world" unquote.

Unlike America's past conflicts, the enemy is not a nation. It's not even one particular organization. Al Qaeda was the architect of the 9/11 attacks to be sure, but there are others equally dangerous. No fewer than 18 organizations loosely affiliated with al Qaeda are conducting terrorist acts in Israel, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Somalia, Algeria, Russia, Indonesia and elsewhere. And it seems to me it's worth noting that each of those nations that have been recently attacked by terrorists -- even though none of those nations have any troops in Iraq -- so the argument that Iraq is some sort of a trigger is obviously inconsistent with the facts.

Unlike prior wars, this enemy is often located in countries with which we're not at war. Some of those countries are friendly to us and some of those countries are not friendly. Some of those countries have military capabilities with considerable capacity to track down terrorists. Other countries -- maybe friendly or not friendly -- lack the military capacity to track down terrorists.

Some of those countries govern their territory reasonably well and still others have large ungoverned areas or (scenes ?) or border areas where terrorists can operate freely in a safe haven.

Because they cannot defeat our forces on the battlefield, they challenge us through nontraditional, asymmetric or irregular means. Interestingly -- particularly to this audience -- the terrorists have a media relations committees. Think of that -- they get up in the morning, have committee meetings and think about how they're going to manipulate the world's press to their advantage. They have repeatedly proven to be highly successful at manipulating the world's media here in this country as well as elsewhere and they carefully plan attacks to garner headlines in their effort to try to break our will.

The United States is not going to lose wars or battles with our capabilities out across the globe. The battle -- the true battle -- is a test of will and the battleground -- the battle space -- is less Iraq and less Afghanistan and more here in the United States and the capitals of Western nations. They operate clandestinely on the Internet, schools and madrasses, through phony charities who front companies and with fake passports and false identities. Because they lurk in shadows without visible armies and are willing to wait long periods between attacks, there's a tendency to underestimate the threat they pose.

During the 1920s, few people took seriously what some characterized as the mad ravings of a failed painter's book, *Mein Kampf*. Similarly, most people earlier ignored the excited utterances of an exiled lawyer -- a so-called rabble rouser -- named Lenin, who had published the pamphlet, *What is to be Done?* But imagine, if we could go back today, knowing what we know now about Adolph Hitler and Lenin, to warn the world about those two individuals before they spawned their movements and before literally tens of millions of human beings on this earth were victims -- were killed?

Today we have a similar opportunity. We can read the fatwahas and the plans that have been publicly outlined by bin Laden and his followers. Get on the Internet. You can find them. You can read them. You can see them. It's not a secret. It's not a mystery. And we have an opportunity to take action before those groups grow still stronger and gain even more adherents. But it's up to our generation to listen and to learn and to act or to be prepared to pay severe penalties.

The enemy's goals should be a mystery to no one.

They seek to take over governments from North Africa to South Asia to reestablish a caliphate they hope one day will include every continent. They have designed and distributed a map where national borders are erased and replaced by a global extremist Islamic empire.

Today they call Iraq the central front in their war against the civilized world, and they hope to turn it into the same sort of haven for training and recruitment that Afghanistan served for the al Qaeda prior to September 11th. In the words of al Qaeda's second in command, Zawahiri, quote, "The first stage, expel the Americans from Iraq. The second stage, establish an Islamic authority. The third stage, extend the jihad." That is their strategy.

We have a strategy as well. First, to use all elements of national power to do everything possible to prevent them from obtaining weapons of mass destruction -- chemical, biological, nuclear. Second, to defend our homeland through sharing intelligence, law enforcement and more integrated homeland defense. And third, to help friendly nations increase their capabilities to fight terrorism in their own countries.

There's been good progress over the past few years. There have been successful elections in Afghanistan and Iraq, the mass rejection of terrorist threats and intimidation, the building of institutions of representative governments -- still fragile in both countries, but evolving.

Think what the terrorists tried to do and failed. They tried to stop the election of a president, the first popularly elected president in the 5,000-year history of Afghanistan. They failed to stop the election of a parliament and of provincial leaders in Afghanistan. They tried and failed to stop the election in January 30th of this year in Iraq. They tried to stop the drafting of an Iraqi constitution and failed. They tried to stop the referendum that approved the Iraqi constitution and -- and failed. And they tried to stop the elections that took place on December 15th of last year in Iraq and they failed.

Every day, Afghan and Iraqi forces are gaining in experience and capability. And as we help our friends increase their ability to fight terrorists -- because in the last analysis, it's their task. They will be the ones over time who will succeed in quelling that insurgency. American forces are able to draw down as the capacity and capabilities of these Iraqi forces improve; not just in Iraq and Afghanistan, but elsewhere.

It's important to understand that this is not war between the West and the Muslim world, as extremists would cast it. This is primarily a war within the Muslim world. It's a struggle between the relatively small fringe groups of extremists -- violent extremists -- who seek to hijack an ancient religion against the overwhelming majority of Muslims, who reject those extremist goals.

The vast majority of people in the Middle East do not share the violent ideology of al Qaeda. They hope for a better future for themselves and for their children. They don't want the extremists to prevail. But they need help, and we need to help to strengthen the moderate Muslim leaders who are battling our common enemy.

Pakistan's President Musharraf recently noted the difference between terrorism and extremism. Terrorism is an act of violence, and it can be combated by military means. Extremism is a state of mind, and it has to be addressed in other ways -- by finding ways to keep extremists from turning into terrorists, by showing them a different way of life.

The transformations that are currently underway in Afghanistan and Iraq have shown those who have been uncertain which side to take in the war on terror that there is an alternative to dictatorial regimes of the past. There's an alternative to the kind of regime that existed in Iraq, that put literally hundreds of thousands of dead in mass graves under the regime of Saddam Hussein.

A recent survey shows that a large and growing number of Muslims believe freedom can work in their countries. More than 80 percent of Afghans have a favorable opinion of the United States, and only 5 percent have a favorable opinion of bin Laden. In Iraq, a growing majority wants a representative government. These views are all the more startling when you consider what Iraq and Afghanistan were -- were like before September 11th, 2001.

Consider the recent words of the Lebanese political leader, a Druze, Walid Jumblat. He has been from time to time a critic of America, and he made these comments about the liberation of Iraq within the last week.

He said, quote, "It's strange for me to say it, but this process of change has started because of the American invasion of Iraq. I was cynical about Iraq, but when I saw the Iraqi people voting three weeks ago -- 8 million of them -- it was the start of a new Arab world." Unquote.

It's no wonder, then, that the terrorist Zarqawi has written of few supporters, a lack of friends and tough times.

Think back to when the enemy launched this war, stating that we were, in their words, a paper tiger. They sought to transform the world and make us, quote, "cower," unquote. Instead, it is their world that's changing.

The only way that terrorists can win this struggle is if we lose our will and surrender the fight, or think it's not important enough, or in confusion or in disagreement among ourselves give them the time to regroup and reestablish themselves in Iraq or elsewhere.

A decade ago, we celebrated the collapse of the Soviet empire and the end of the Cold War. But that war -- what President Kennedy called, quote, "a long twilight struggle," unquote -- lasted some 45 years before we saw a hope of victory.

In its early decades, the way was uncertain. Allies bickered over tactics. They bickered over strategies. They even bickered over the seriousness of the threat. There were motions in Congress to pull all of our forces out of Europe and -- and concede. Euro-communism became fashionable. It's not really communism, it's Euro-communism, so it's okay.

Then as now, we found ourselves building new organizations to help in our new circumstances. And today, in many ways, we find ourselves echoing the words once spoken by Dwight Eisenhower in the early decades of the Cold War. He said, quote, "We face a hostile ideology, global in scope, ruthless in purpose and insidious in method. To meet it successfully, we must carry forward steadily, surely and without complaint the burdens of a prolonged and complex struggle with liberty the stake." Unquote. And we did.

Once more, history is being written by the valiant men and women of our armed forces and, I would add, by determined American citizens, who once again are demonstrating perseverance -- the perseverance needed to win this test of wills.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: We have a lot of questions. The first one talks about the war on terror. By comparing the war on terror to the Cold War or World War II, aren't you elevating the status of al Qaeda? They can kill a lot of people, but are they comparable to the Soviets or the Nazis?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I thought the Eisenhower quote was apt. And I think that if one thinks of those words and compares them to today -- Eisenhower said we face a hostile ideology. We do today. That it's global in scope. It's clearly global in scope today. That it's ruthless in purpose. People who behead people obviously are ruthless. Those who behead people on television and are proud of it are particularly ruthless. And insidious in method, and to meet it successfully we must carry forward steadily. They are contending that we don't have the perseverance, that we will cower. And it says surely and without complaint we must do so -- Eisenhower said. Well, there were complaints during the Cold War and there are complaints today and it is a burden, but the stake is the same. The stake is liberty. And I think the answer to your question is no.

MR. SALANT: You have not caught bin Laden. Why not? (Laughter.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: We haven't found him. (Laughter, applause.) We don't know where he is. It is very easy for a single individual to hide for a long period of time. Look at the people on the FBI's Most Wanted List in this country -- just one country. And they're there for years -- years and years.

Our task in the Department of Defense is not to find single individuals so much as it is to fight and combat big armies, big navies and big air forces. And the FBI works on this, the intelligence community works on it. And I can tell you this, that with a 90-nation coalition -- 80-, 85-, whatever it is nation coalition -- there's a great deal of pressure on that fella. And I assume he's alive. I don't know that, but if he is you can be sure he is very busy every day trying not to get caught. And that makes it, I would think, not easy for him to carry out his evil purposes.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Off mike.)

MR. SALANT: This questioner writes -- (speaker raises voice) -- this questioner writes explain to me how the war on terror ends?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Off mike.)

MR. SALANT: Secretary Rumsfeld, I'm sorry that your First Amendment rights were not respected at a -- at a -- at the National Press Club.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Off mike.)

(Boos.)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Off mike.)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Shut up! (Laughter, applause.)

MR. SALANT: We'll count her as undecided. (Laughter.)

Secretary, I'm sorry that your First Amendment rights were not respected at a Press Club that is dedicated to the First Amendment.

This questioner writes, explain to me how the war on terror ends?

SEC. RUMSFELD: The task is to build partner capacity around the world, to work with other countries, and to have them be successful in seeing that people who are today being brought in to the intake to be studying at radical madrassa schools to learn how to kill people instead are going into schools and they're being taught things that are useful to them to participate in the world.

And -- and it's not possible today to know precisely when it will end or how it will end, but the way it will end is not with a signing ceremony on the USS Missouri as World War II did. It will end because individual countries, collectively cooperating, will be successful in reducing the numbers of people that are attracted to terrorism.

And the way that will be done, by not just military means and not simply putting pressure on terrorists and capturing and killing as many as you can find, but creating a set of pressures within countries so that the attraction of this is diminished and that the schools are able to teach people the right things instead of the wrong things.

I think it will end. The Cold War ended. No one knew when it would or if it would. It took 45 years, but it did end. And it will end -- this will end. I think -- I think that it will not end with a bang, it will end with a whimper. It'll -- it'll fade down over a sustained period of time as more countries in the world are successful.

I would add this. We have a strange practice in this country that any time a country does something we don't like, we cut off our relationships with them in terms of our military-to-military education, training programs and the like. And it has -- it has proven to have been unhelpful.

For example, we severed our relationships with Pakistan some years back and we lost a generation of relationships. Fortunately, there's a leader in Pakistan that is a participant in helping us in the global war on terror. But there are large segments of his population where that's not the case.

We did the same thing with Indonesia. The government of Indonesia engaged in some human rights activities that were unacceptable to us. We decided the first thing we'd do is cut off our military-to-military relationship and not have any interaction with the military in Indonesia.

Today, you've got a moderate Indonesian Muslim leader. The military is the institution that reaches across that whole country. Their interaction with our military has always been a very positive thing. They come to this country. They understand civilian control. And they understand the importance of respect for human rights. And yet, we have lost, again, a generation of relationships there.

We're going to have to be wiser in how we do these things it seems to me.

MR. SALANT: The president is going to unveil his budget on Monday. The House Armed Services Committee chairman said today that the Pentagon shouldn't have to choose between cutting weapons or cutting Army brigades, but you are. He said the Defense budget should be higher. Your response?

(Laughter.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: I work for the president. But let me say one other thing. (Laughter.) The defense budget has gone up every year in the last five years. We have been able to fund the important things that are needed. It is a sizable amount of money. We are finding ways to operate that department in ways that are considerably more efficient and more respectful of taxpayers' dollars. We are getting much more for the dollar today than we were five years ago. We are shifting our weight in many ways in the department. In one way it's away from the institutional military, the tail, into the teeth part, so we have greater capabilities and more forces in the teeth as opposed to the tail in the teeth-to-tail ratio.

We have gone more towards speed and away from mass. We've gone towards agility and we've gone towards precision. You know, 10 years ago, 15 years you'd take 10 dumb bombs to hit a single target. Today you could reduce the number of bombs from 10 to five and have five smart bombs and you can get five targets. So you've gone up by five times your ability to get a target even though you've reduced your bombs in half.

The same thing is true with a ship. Today we've almost doubled the deployable days that ships can go out by managing more efficiently that force -- reducing the downtime when they're in maintenance, swapping crews by flying them out to the ship so you don't have the downtime of the ship coming all the way back and then all the way back out. We're getting a lot more capability per dollar than we did in previous periods.

We are increasing the number of combat brigades from 33 to 42, so we're going to have a more capable Army, and we're doing it by shifting skill sets, by increasing the teeth compared to the tail. My feeling is that the defense budget is appropriate and that we will be getting a great deal more out of it than we did in earlier periods because of the steps that have been taken to improve the effectiveness of the military.

MR. SALANT: Lawmakers are also up in arms about your plan to have fewer Guard brigades. Why are you doing that?

SEC. RUMSFELD: The number of Guard people, as I understand it from Pete Schoomaker, the chief of staff of the Army and the secretary of the Army, will be essentially the same, and that they'll not reduce the number. What we're doing with the Guard -- first of all, anytime anything is done to the Guard, people get concerned. Change is hard for people, and we understand that. Unfortunately, the world changed under us and we have to make changes. What we're doing is making substantial changes, and so people look at that and they say, oh, my goodness, it's always been this way; oughtn't it to continue to be that way? And the answer is, no, not necessarily.

But we'll get through this. They'll understand eventually because what we're basically doing to the Guard is we're maintaining the levels, for all practical purposes, and we are changing skill sets within the reserve component -- the Guard and Reserves -- so that the kinds of skills sets that will exist there will be vastly more valuable to the governors and the states for the kinds of homeland security or various missions that occur, than they are today. I mean, what good is air defense or artillery or tankers if you have a Katrina or a Rita or a fire of some kind or a forest fire?

So they're going to be happy. When it's all over, when they understand what's being done, they're going to have more capable guardsmen with skill sets that are appropriate than they do today, and the numbers will be, for all practical purposes, roughly the same. Now, that is not to say that we're not going to have to go through a period where people are going to say, oh, my goodness, it's changing and this is going to be this way and that's going to be that way. We'll work our way through it, and when it's all over, the country will be better off for it.

MR. SALANT: We've got a lot of questions about the Tom Toles cartoon in the Washington Post. Mr. Secretary, what's your opinion of it? And one questioner writes, "What role does the Joint Chiefs of Staff have in its official capacity to publicly condemn political speech protected by the U.S. Constitution?"

SEC. RUMSFELD: With respect to the latter, you're not suggesting that the chiefs should be restricted in free speech, are you? (Laughter.) I had no idea they were writing a letter. They decided to do it. They're talented people and fine people and understand our system and made that decision, and they have every right to do that insofar as I'm aware. They express their views before Congress all the time. They express their views in the press all the time. And I'm not going to comment on their letter except to say that in my view they have the right to do that.

As to the cartoon, you know, no one questions the right of a cartoonist to do what they want to do, and people do it all the time. They've been doing it for decades. People made fun of George Washington. They just brutally savaged Abraham Lincoln. I was alive during the Roosevelt era and can recall what was said about him in the public press in the cartoons. They were vicious and -- really vicious. The hostility during that war -- I was here during the period of Vietnam, and Lyndon Johnson couldn't leave the White House to give a speech anywhere. There were busses -- he had to put busses around the White House so no one could drive in there. And the cartoons on Lyndon Johnson were perfectly terrible. That's the way it is here. It comes with the territory I guess is all I can say.

MR. SALANT: "With the recent high-profile wounding of the two ABC correspondents and the kidnapping of Jill Carroll," this questioner asks, "do you believe journalists are still not getting out enough to report the real story of Iraq?"

SEC. RUMSFELD: The journalists have a couple of choices, of course. They can, in many instances, go out on their own. In other instances they can become embedded in an activity that is going on with the U.S. forces. In other instances they have found their way to become embedded with Iraqi forces, or foreign forces. And in anything they do, there is a risk. And to the extent they leave a highly protected compound area, as they do from time to time, they're at risk.

And anyone is at risk who does that -- the military people, the non-governmental workers, the civilian employees of the government, contractors and the like.

MR. SALANT: The last questions about Iraq -- the first one from this questioner: "What do you say to a young GI on his or her third tour of duty in Iraq?"

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, first of all, GI -- if you mean by that a soldier, Army, there are, to my knowledge, no Army people who are back for their third one-year tour that weren't volunteers. First of all, everybody in the military today is a volunteer, so the first thing I would say to them is thank you for volunteering, thank you for deciding you wanted to serve the country, thank you for putting up your hand and saying, send me.

The tour lengths are quite different. The Army has a year -- up to a year in Iraq. The Marine Corps has seven months -- up to seven months. The Navy deployments tend to be six months in and 12 months back. The Air Force differs widely. Some are a year; some are three months rotation where they go back in frequently. But anyone who is there on a third tour for a year, you can be absolutely certain volunteered, and I say thank you for volunteering.

MR. SALANT: "Considering the amount of progress being made by the Iraqi security forces, do you think it is still feasible to reduce U.S. forces in Iraq to below 100,000?"

SEC. RUMSFELD: I never said I did. The Iraq security forces are now up to 227,000 I think, the last time I looked. They're increasingly experienced. They're increasingly well equipped and trained. We have embedded U.S. military personnel with them, so we have near instantaneous visibility into what their weaknesses are, and to the extent those kinds of weaknesses can be rectified, they get rectified in a relatively short period of time.

They're doing a good job. They handled the security for the election. As they stand up, we're going to stand down. As the president has said, it's condition based. To the extent they can manage -- here this last week they took over another big piece of real estate about the size of Kentucky. We've closed or passed over something like 29 military bases to them, and that path just continues. And as that keeps going, we ought to be able to pull down our troops, but anyone who predicts 100,000 or some other number I think is making a mistake because to the extent it's condition based it depends to some extent on their neighbors: How does Iran behave? How does Syria behave? To what extent do the neighboring Sunni countries encourage the Iraqi Sunnis to participate in the government and stop their insurgency? How successful will we be in squeezing down the bank accounts of the terrorists?

There are all kinds of variables, and certainly I know I'm not smart enough to predict what the levels will be, but we've gone from 160,000 back down to our baseline of 138,000, and General Casey and General Abizaid recommended that we take two more brigades down, and that will be happening. And as the Iraqis continue to be more capable and they have bigger numbers, one would think we'd be able to continue that track.

In the last analysis, it's their country. We've sent the best young men and women that we have over there to help them. They now have had their elections. They're going to have to grab a hold

of their country and make it work. It ain't going to work like ours. It isn't going to be an American democracy. Their military is not going to look just like ours. And there will be some bumps in the road. It isn't easy to go from a vicious dictatorship to a democracy. It wasn't easy for us. It took us a long time. Think of our first Constitution. We still had slaves. Women couldn't vote. You know, nobody's perfect. It's going to be bumpy, but it's going to get done, and our country is going to have the perseverance to see it gets done.

MR. SALANT: This questioner sent us two quotes from you from --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Oh, I don't like to be told what I said. (Laughter.)

MR. SALANT: -- from March 2003. One says, "With each passing day Saddam Hussein advances his arsenal of weapons of mass destruction and can pass them along to terrorists." Another one says, "He claims to have no biological or chemical weapons, yet we know he continues to hide biological and chemical weapons, moving them to different locations as often as every 24 hours and placing them in residential neighborhoods." What's your reaction today? No WMD have been found in Iraq.

SEC. RUMSFELD: You've answered it. Saddam Hussein had chemical weapons. He used them on his own people; he used them on his neighbors. That's a matter of fact. We know he had a nuclear program in an earlier period and that the intelligence community concluded that he may have continued to aspire to have a nuclear program. We know that the intelligence community believed he had chemical weapons, and said so, and our intelligence officials and Secretary Powell testified to that before the U.N.

We have not found them. We also have found a number of things we didn't imagine. We found a bunch of jet airplanes buried in Iraq. Who buries airplanes? (Laughter.) I mean, really. So I don't know what we'll find in the months and years ahead. It could be anything.

MR. SALANT: The last question is about elsewhere in the world. "How do you see the U.S.-Kuwait strategic relationship unfolding under the new emir, particularly regarding the U.S. vision for Iraq and the role of Kuwait as a U.S. partner in that vision?"

SEC. RUMSFELD: I don't think there will be any change at all. The leadership there I think will provide similar continuity. There is a country that was invaded by Iraq. It was savaged by Iraq. It's clearly a country that has been very much a partner in the war on terror and in the efforts in Iraq. And then my impression of the new leadership is that it will be pretty much a continuum.

MR. SALANT: "While the spotlight focus is in Iran, what is the status of efforts to get North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons? Is North Korea willing to negotiate?"

SEC. RUMSFELD: I guess the answer to that varies from week to week. We've seen them come together in the six-party talks and we've seen them decide not to go back in the six-party talks. We've seen them agree to various things back in the '90s -- late '90s, the agreed framework, and then we've seen them breach the agreed framework and several other agreements. It's an open question. The hope is that the nations -- the People's Republic of China and the Republic of

Korea -- South Korea, and Japan and the United States and Russia -- will be able to be successful at some point in persuading the leadership in that country, that they would be advantaged by taking the route that Mr. Qadhafi took in Libya. If you think, here's a country that was developing nuclear capability, had been on the terrorist list and engaging in activities that were harmful to free nations and made a conscious decision to not do that and has been systematically adjusting the trajectory or the vector -- vector of their lives and their country in a way that's constructive. And it's entirely possible something like that can happen. It's also entirely possible that it won't, and time will tell. They're just working their heads off on the diplomatic track as they should.

MR. SALANT: "How concerned are you about political trends in South America? Do we face a new wave of left-wing, anti-American regimes?"

SEC. RUMSFELD: Oh, I don't know that I'd characterize it that way. I am concerned. I was very grateful that the CAFTA passed, the free trade agreement for Central America. I was disturbed that it was only by one vote. I think that protectionism is an unhealthy impulse for our country. I think that the countries of Central America right now are leaning forward very much. They want to cooperate politically and economically and from a military standpoint. And we should be encouraging that and trying to assist. I think the characterization of what's happening in Latin America as anti-American is probably -- it misses the mark in this sense: we saw dictatorships there. And then we saw most of those countries with the exception of Cuba, for the most part, move towards democracy. We also saw corruption in that part of the world, and corruption is something that is corrosive of democracy. If you think about it, free people elect people, and they then see a system that has corruption. And it's disturbing to them. And as a result, we've seen some populist leadership appealing to masses of people in those countries, and elections like Evo Morales in Bolivia take place that clearly are worrisome. I mean, it -- you've got Chavez in Venezuela with a lot of oil money. He's a person who was elected legally just as Adolf Hitler was elected legally and then consolidated power and now is, of course, working with Fidel Castro and Mr. Morales and others. It concerns me.

I think that people -- the natural state of people is to want to be free. And so any system that is not a free system -- political and economic free system -- I think is unlikely to give them the kinds of opportunities that they can have in a free system. I mean, if you look at North Korea and South Korea and take a satellite picture from overhead at night and see the demilitarized zone, South Korea is just filled with lights and electricity and energy. They have a free political, free economic system. Same people in the north, same resources in the north, but a repressive political system and a command economy -- not a light except in Pyongyang. You can't see anything in that satellite photo except the line of the DMZ with electricity south and, in the north, just in the capital city of Pyongyang. And it tells the story. Free systems do better for people. People have more opportunity.

And therefore any time I see countries in any hemisphere, including this one, turn away from free systems towards command systems of various types, I worry about it. And I wish it weren't the case because one has to care about the circumstances of those people. If you go to North Korea and think about it -- what's happening there -- the people have had so little food over much of their lives that they take people in the North Korean military that are 4'10" tall -- these

are men -- and less than 100 pounds. There's concern that their IQs are going to be going down because of malnutrition and insufficient diet. That's a tragedy. Their basic business in North Korea is -- you know, they're counterfeiting U.S. dollars. They're selling illicit drugs. They are selling missile technologies to several countries. They've demonstrated willingness to proliferate almost any military capability they're able to develop, and that's their life. That's their lives, and that's sad. That's a shame.

MR. SALANT: "What effect will the election of Hamas, a group that the U.S. branded terrorist organization, have on the Middle East?"

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, time will tell. Hamas, of course, is still considered a terrorist organization. I think they were probably surprised they won the election, and how they're going to manage their affairs I just don't know. The -- from everything everyone can see, election was a fair one. And they now have the opportunity to -- I shouldn't say opportunity -- also have the responsibility to decide how they're going to use that power that they just got. Are they going to continue as a terrorist organization, in which case, most countries -- many countries will not want to deal with them, which of course puts their people -- the Palestinian people in a very difficult situation because they've been living on funds from other countries to help support them for a long time? And to the extent countries cut off those funds and did not want to deal with the Hamas, a terrorist organization, that would be -- they have the right to do what they did. And Hamas now has the right to make decisions they want to make. And if they make decisions one way, they'll end up still having cooperation from other countries in the world. To the extent they make decisions in another way, they very likely will have less cooperation in the world. And I guess that's what free choice is about.

MR. SALANT: "How is the partnership between U.S. and NATO and Russia getting along? Is it more of a challenge or more of an opportunity?"

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, it depends on the month. The -- I see the Russian defense minister frequently. He's a very talented and capable person, and the president sees President Putin frequently. NATO -- the relationship between United States and NATO is basically a very good one. We've worked closely together. We've undertaken a number of initiatives, one of which we supported the NATO-Russia council. The kind of ties that are being developed with Russia are useful. They are still in their early stages. Russia continues to do some things from time to time that are not helpful. And so it's one of those things that is finding its way, and it's -- it'll be interesting to see how it evolves.

I'm hopeful for Russia. I mean, they've got intelligent people. They have a lot of excellent scientists and mathematicians. They've got a large country with a lot of resources. And to the extent they're successful in creating an environment that's hospitable to foreign investment, they have a chance to be a very successful country. You know, to the extent they decide they want to create an environment that's inhospitable to free people and to foreign investment, then they'll receive less of that. Their interaction with the rest of the world will be muted somewhat, and they will not be as successful as they otherwise might be. It's going to be kind of a self-correcting process is my guess. And I certainly -- I think from the standpoint of the Russian people, it would be a wonderful thing if they would stay on a track towards democracy and towards free

systems and opportunity and create an environment there that does attract the rest of the world to invest and to participate and to interact.

MR. SALANT: This questioner writes about a recent report about the Defense Department monitoring anti-war protestors and wants to know why the Defense Department is doing that.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, I wasn't aware of it at all, but it turns out that -- this is no surprise to anyone here -- the Department of Defense has the responsibility in the United States for force protection. We don't have the responsibility for homeland security. That's for the Department of Homeland Security. We do have the responsibility, however, to protect our own forces. And apparently what took place was a perfectly understandable thing. They decided that the way -- given the assignment to do that, they decided to establish a program whereby they would be able to observe and do the kind of counter surveillance to see who was taking pictures of military installations or sensitive activities and who was observing them and gather information of that type so that we would not be accused of failing to protect our forces and their families and the military installations in the country.

And so they began this process. According to the people who have briefed me on it, to do that, you obviously end up scooping up information, whether it's names or films or whatever, to protect your base. And that information then comes into a databank. And, you know, think of 9/11. Everyone accused the government of not connecting the dots. You didn't connect the dots before the fact, and you weren't able to stop it. So here they are trying to connect the dots, and someone looks on it and says, oh, my goodness gracious. Isn't that terrible? You're collecting information on people in the United States. And of course if you look at it, that's what it is. It's information about people who are physically in the United States, who are observing a base in some way.

And so they put in some new rules whereby the people doing this have to purge the system periodically so we don't end up with massive data that we don't need and don't want and didn't intend to keep in the first place. And they then review what there is and see -- is there a threat to that base of some kind? Is there something that should be turned over to the FBI? And it's no different in a sense than a private business that has a building or a factory or a facility and has a security force, and they have surveillance of it to see who's looking at it and what's being done. But because of the sensitivity of it, obviously, it became a big cause celebre. And I think, at least I'm told, that they now think they've put in place the kinds of procedures so that the information that's gathered will not become a permanent record and will be purged appropriately. And to the extent they connect any dots, they obviously turn them over to the FBI or whoever -- local law enforcement if they're concerned about some security thing. In short, it's no big deal.

(Laughter.)

MR. SALANT: I got two questions about this one. "Can a person reenlist in the Army or the armed forces with a undesirable discharge?"

SEC. RUMSFELD: I don't know if there's a time limit on something like that.

MR. SALANT: Before we ask our last question, Mr. Secretary, I'd like to present you with the coveted National Press Club coffee mug -- (laughter) -- and also a certificate of appreciation for appearing. Thank you very much.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Thank you -- (inaudible).

(Applause.)

MR. SALANT: "Not since Robert McNamara four decades ago has a defense secretary been so identified with what polls say is an unpopular war. History has not been kind to Mr. McNamara. How do you see history treating you?"

SEC. RUMSFELD: You know -- (laughter) -- I don't have the vaguest idea. (Laughter.) But I'll tell you this. I don't worry about it. I can tell you one thing for sure. The people writing the news today, tomorrow, and the next day are not writing history. It will take a little while, a little perspective. If you go back to any conflict in our history, during the time it was underway, the people involved in it were criticized, in many cases, viciously. And think, had we not persevered in the Revolutionary War when they wanted to fire George Washington -- think of that. Abraham Lincoln. I -- the only thing I'll say is -- answer the damn phone. (Laughter, applause.) I get up every day proud and privileged and indeed honored to be able to work at a time that's this important with the men and women in uniform who are doing such a superb job. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: Thank you for coming today. Please stay in the room and remain seated until the Secretary leaves. I'd also like to thank National Press Club members Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, Jo Ann Booz and Howard Rothman for their organizing today's lunch, and the Press Club library for their research. We're adjourned. (Sounds gavel.)

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