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Defense Department Town Hall Meeting With Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld (transcript and question and answer period)

Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, Pentagon Auditorium, Thursday, March 7, 2002.

SEC. RUMSFELD: (Applause.) Thank you very much. Please be seated. I think they brought me in the wrong door. (Laughter.) Good afternoon, and thank you very much for coming and for being here and for all you do.

First, I do want to acknowledge the folks who are waging the war on terrorism, especially those who died so recently in service to our country. They certainly died in an important cause, fighting for peace and freedom. And the nation and, indeed, the world owes them and their families a deep debt of gratitude.

We also need to acknowledge the folks in this room and the 2.7 million men and women on active duty, in the Guard and the Reserve who wear our country's uniform, and the nearly 700,000 civilians who support that fighting force. Together you all make up, without question, the finest military in the history of the world. (Applause.)

My days are so full, I can't quite remember for sure. But my recollection is that the last time I was here may have been September 10th. And certainly the world has changed a great deal in the intervening period. At that time we were -- as the press likes to say, we launched an all-out campaign to shift the Department of Defense resources from bureaucracy to the battlefield. We talked about savings, and we talked about transforming the department as well as our forces. And it would seem on reflection that that set of remarks and the meeting we held in this room at that time on September 10th, 2001 was not a moment too soon.

I said then and I believe now that the modernization of the department is an imperative, because the lives of all Americans and, indeed, our friends and allies depend on it. I'm happy to report that despite all that has happened in the intervening period, this department, each of you, our defense establishment has been moving forward. If you think back on the last 12 months, in one year we've adopted a new defense strategy for the Department of Defense and the country, we've replaced the decade-old two major regional conflict force sizing construct with an approach that is unquestionably more appropriate to the 21st century, we have adopted a new method of balancing risks -- in fact, I can remember discussing that on September 10th, the importance of finding ways for this department to not just be able to balance one war risk against another, or one modernization risk against another, or one failure to transform risk against another failure to transform risk, or, indeed, the risks involving human beings, the people: the risks of not having the appropriate pay scales, not having the appropriate housing, not having the appropriate facilities that create an environment that's hospitable to the kinds of men and women that we need to have on active duty.

We do believe we have better ways -- not perfect, to be sure -- but better ways of balancing all of those risks among themselves, but also between those different categories. It's a very hard thing to do to balance a war risk against a failure to transform; how much more important is an aircraft today against some research and development money that will not benefit us, truly, for five, 10, 15 years? That's a very difficult thing to do.

We've also reorganized and revitalized our Missile Defense Research and Testing Program. And this June, it will be free of the ABM Treaty that had restricted it a great deal. Now we'll be able to go ahead with the research and development program to conceivably find the most cost-effective way to provide for ballistic missile defense.

We have reorganized the department so that we're better able -- we believe better able to focus on our space activities, and created a better focus, an executive agent in the Air Force, and we hope that that will enable us to do a better job.

We've completed a year-long Nuclear Posture Review, which is going to permit the country to have deep reductions in strategic offensive weapons without any reduction in our security. And, given the investments we're including, we ought to be able to have a more responsive infrastructure for our strategic nuclear capability.

We have developed, and briefed the president but not yet announced, a new Unified Command Plan, which Dick Myers, the chairman of the [Joint] Chiefs, indicates is probably the most significant change in the Unified Command Plan in his recollection. At the moment, we're busy consulting and briefing some of our allies who are affected, some of our neighbors who are affected, and some members of the House and Senate who have a particular interest in it.

And last, we worked to increase the pay and other benefits for men and women in uniform and worked to try to strengthen the bond of trust between the men and women in uniform and the civilian

employees and the leadership in the country.

And all this has been accomplished during a year, the past 12 months, when we had only a handful of administration appointees confirmed, none for several months except me, and then Dr. [Paul] Wolfowitz [Deputy Secretary of Defense] came in, and then more started coming in the summer. And since September, we've had a war on terrorism. So for a department that has a reputation as being incapable of changing with the times and incapable of making adjustments to fit new circumstances, I would say that the last 12 months have been impressive indeed in terms of the amount of change, which will then be playing out over the coming two, four, six, eight, 10 years.

We're currently working on something that will also have a significant effect, and that is the, oh, six, eight, 10, 12 significant leadership positions, military leadership positions, which are currently under review and which we will be announcing in the period ahead. When we talk about transformation, probably the single most important thing will be the people that are selected for those key spots, the various combatant commanders around, the other major positions which come up. Because it's a year where the Congress will not be in session throughout the year, very likely, we have to get an awful lot of that done in the period prior to fall, so we'll be announcing a whole series of changes that will be coming along.

The war on terrorism, just a brief comment. We have coalition forces in large numbers participating. There's an awful lot of talk about the United States and what we're doing, and that's important, to be sure; but we do have to keep reminding ourselves that there are dozens and dozens and dozens of countries that are giving us truly wonderful cooperation. I was looking at some numbers yesterday, and we had something like 102 ships in the Central Command's area of responsibility, and more than half of them were not our ships. So we have more ships involved in the various activities in that region that are other countries' than we do our own.

The coalition forces have in a short time, since September 11th of last year, planned and executed a military campaign in Afghanistan that has clearly disrupted the use of that country as a haven for terrorists. They have captured or killed a large number of Taliban and al Qaeda fighters, including a number of the very senior members of their leadership. We have removed a repressive Taliban regime from that country and liberated a people that when -- if you recall the photographs when the forces moved into those towns, the feeling of joy and relief that was expressed was truly exhilarating.

We've provided hundreds of millions of dollars, the United States, and, through our coalition, many, many hundreds of millions of dollars more of humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan, which was truly needed

And we have been in the process of assisting the interim Afghan government to try to get their sea legs and provide a more stable and secure environment so that hopefully the people of that country can see much less suffering in the years ahead than they have in the recent years.

What lies ahead. Well, we're going to continue to work the problem, the al Qaeda and the Taliban and the other global terrorist networks. We're going to continue to work with the coalition countries and see that they cooperate with law enforcement, with intelligence-sharing as well as with military assistance and financial assistance in closing bank accounts. We're going to intensify our efforts to see that there is no safe haven, that there is no sanctuary for terrorists.

If you think about it, Afghanistan is a relatively small country, the size of Texas, roughly. And yet they trained literally thousands and thousands and thousands of terrorists, who have been spread throughout the world in 40, 50 or 60 countries, in cells, well financed, well organized, extremely well trained. And think of the threat they posed to the world, and, indeed, the threat they still pose today. They were able to do that because the al Qaeda went in and, in effect, took over the country with the cooperation of the Taliban. We cannot have that happen in another country.

I get asked from time to time why in the world are we in Yemen helping some folks there to improve their intelligence-gathering, to improve the training for direct action, and the answer is simply because if we don't, that would be a very natural sanctuary for the al Qaeda as they flush out of Afghanistan and get run out of Iran or out of Pakistan and need another place to go. The bin Laden family came from the borderline between Saudi Arabia and Yemen. It is an extremely dangerous place. There are al Qaeda there now. Fortunately, the government of Yemen has been very cooperative and, in fact, has gone in and arrested a number of al Qaeda leadership within recent weeks.

We have to continue to try to disrupt terrorist activities and to pursue the nexus of those activities with state-sponsored terrorism, and particularly those countries that have weaponized -- weapons of mass destruction. And there are a growing number of countries that are doing that.

What we saw happen on September 11th involved thousands of innocent people -- a lot of them from our country, but a lot of them from every country in the world, almost, in the World Trade Center. And all one has to do is imagine people willing to do that who have access or gain access to -- for weapons of mass destruction, whether chemical or biological or radiation or nuclear, and you're looking at not thousands of people being affected and killed but tens of thousands and potentially hundreds of thousands.

So it's a -- this is a enormously serious problem, and the president of the United States, in my view, has provided superb leadership and demonstrated a steadiness of purpose that this will take -- it is not, as he said, something that will be dealt with in days or weeks or months. It is something that we have to recognize will take years. And as he said, we will not tire. We will not falter. And we cannot fail. (Applause.)

Now I'd be delighted to respond to questions -- even from behind me, but -- as a --

Yes.

Q Good afternoon, sir. My name is Dan Carpen (sp). I'm a support contractor for OSD/CQ Dye (sp).

SEC. RUMSFELD: How'd you get a ticket?

Q What's that, sir?

SEC. RUMSFELD: How'd you get a ticket? (Laughter.)

Q (Laughs.) I have friends in high places. (Laughter.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: There you go!

Q I also like to remind you, sir, I'm a combat contractor from the Gulf War.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Good.

Q I'm proud to say that.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Thank you.

Q My question to you, sir, is, what are we and our coalition partners doing to seal off the Pakistani and the Iranian border from allowing pro-Taliban and al Qaeda fighters to infiltrate into Afghanistan to join up with the guerrilla forces?

SEC. RUMSFELD: The situation essentially is this: With respect to the borders of Afghanistan, that border I guess is -- I'd have to count, but it's something like six countries if you count a strip with China -- a very small piece. It -- their borders are porous. The area is populated by tribes that have, through hundreds of years, been moving back and forth across those borders like the borders aren't even there. The terrain is rugged. It is an extremely difficult thing to do.

Imagine trying to be absolutely sure that you'd block the border with Canada.

I mean, think of the logging trails, think of the deer and elk and moose that wander back and forth up there, and folks who have been doing it for many, many years. It's something that's really not doable in small numbers. It is doable if one's talking about very large forces. And fortunately, the Pakistani government has been just enormously cooperative. They have large numbers of soldiers along the border. They have historically not been in the tribal areas, which are a lot like our Indian reservations, which are pretty much self-governing, in Pakistan. But they have been recently going into the tribal areas and working with the people there so that they could do a better job of trying to block the border.

We have used a lot of intelligence assets to try to monitor what's taking place. We have had some help

from Uzbekistan and from Tajikistan. The Iranian border is as porous as it ever has been, going both ways. What we are doing currently with Operation Anaconda in a relatively confined area east of Kabul, south of Gardez, is we have people all the way around the al Qaeda and Taliban folks who are in there so that we believe we have observation posts and forces -- I think there are six countries, seven countries involved, including the U.S. and Afghanistan -- so that people cannot get in there to reinforce, we believe, or get out who we do not want to get out.

But it is a never-ending task. It's a tough problem. And, I mean, you think of the problem we have on our border with Mexico: how many people move back and forth quite easily. So all you can do is your best, and that's exactly what those folks are doing.

Yes. (Pause.) Someone's going to tell me if one of you is going to ask a question? (Laughter.) Just go. (Laughter.)

Q Mr. Secretary, I am Chuck Nelson (sp), the Department of the Navy. And my question is how does the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians impact our war on terrorism, and what role do you see the United States playing in solving that conflict?

SEC. RUMSFELD: The president of the United States and Secretary Colin Powell and the ambassadors have been continuously involved for the past 12 months in working with both sides of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Palestinian conflict. I am pushing 70 years old, and that conflict's been going on most of my -- all of my adult lifetime.

And it's a tough one. So the fact that it's not solved ought not to be surprising. It is a difficult situation.

You have to work it. You have to try to keep seeing that it is not getting worse. It is unlikely you're going to solve it, to be perfectly honest. Not impossible, but it's very, very difficult. But if you're not trying to work the problem, it can get worse and deteriorate into a much more lethal conflict.

The efforts have been serious. George Tenet's [Director of the Central Intelligence Agency] been involved. There's a security plan that's out there. The new initiative by the Saudis is an interesting one in the sense that really for the first time, that country, in effect, said under certain circumstances we could find a formula that Israel could live in the region in peace, which is a step beyond what a good many other of Israel's neighbors have been willing to say for some time.

So all one can do is keep working the problem. It's a little bit like two dancers. If someone leans back, the other one leans forward; if one leans forward, the other leans back. And it seems to continue over these many decades.

In answer to the other part of your question, there are differences of opinion as to the extent to which it affects the war on terrorism. If you talk to some of the neighboring states that are concerned about the Palestinian problem from the standpoint of their own stability, there's no question they will tell you

that dealing with that problem is of the first order and it needs to be tapped down so there's less violence if the war on terrorism is going to continue to be successful.

Elsewhere in the world, the war on terrorism is proceeding apace. And indeed, even in those regions we're getting very good cooperation from any number of the countries. President Mubarak [of Egypt] was just here. I met with him yesterday or the day before. Prince Abdullah of Jordan has been in. And they are all cooperating in the war on terrorism.

Questions. Yes?

Q Sir, Commander John Floyd (sp). I work on the OPNAV staff.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Greetings.

Q We've seen in Afghanistan the need -- continued need for Navy deep strike, close air support capabilities. I was wondering, as another venerable war horse, if you thought, maybe, about bringing back the A-6 Intruder, sir. (Laughter.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: (Laughs.) No, I haven't. (Laughter.) They don't let me think about Navy airplanes anymore. They make me think about it all. And as matter of fact, we just came out of an hour- plus meeting with the chiefs and the senior civilian officials of the government, talking about exactly that subject, strike, and how it can best be achieved to gain the effects that one is interested in. And the perspective that was before the house was not Army, Navy or Air Force; the perspective before the house was, what is the best way to achieve our goals and the end state that we want to in the most efficient way. And we looked at the full spectrum of possibilities to do that.

And we're very seriously addressing that important issue as part of the preparation for the defense planning guidance.

Questions? Yes?

Q Hello, sir. My name is Staff Sergeant Triggs (sp), and I'm with Army News Service. As I talk today, we have troops who are currently under heavy fire in Operation Anaconda. Could you tell me how long do you think their battle might be going on?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I don't think it's knowable at the moment. One would assume days, not weeks or months. I'd be reluctant to be any more precise than that.

It is very difficult to know the number of al Qaeda and Taliban that are there. If you've watched the press, the press is not terribly far distant from the internal intelligence information, and the numbers have been changing dramatically -- that is, the speculation as to how many are there. And I suspect we will not know how many are in there until it's over.

We do know there are very deep caves and tunnels, that they are exceedingly well dug-in, that air power works to a certain extent. They're also well-supplied. They seem not to be short of ammunition and supplies, although it's only a few days -- what is it? It started on Friday, as I recall, and today is Wednesday -- Thursday. So it's -- some time's passed, and it strikes me that it should end -- I would think it would end -- sometime this weekend or next week. But I just -- one can't be sure.

We also have -- if we've learned anything, we've learned that it is very hard to know precisely what's taking place by way of going in and out of that supposedly carefully watched area.

Q (Off mike.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: Your voice is very loud. (Laughter.)

Q (Off mike.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: It's because he has earmuffs on. (Laughter.) He can't hear himself.

It's very hard to know what's going in and out of that area. We think we have observation posts everywhere that one needs them, so that people can get neither in or out. But we can't be certain of that. And there's no doubt in my mind we -- we know of the fact that an awful lot of people have been trying to get out and haven't been making it.

But we never can know if it's all the people that we're trying to get out.

There seems to be no inclination to surrender. We have not seen or heard any willingness to do that, although we've looked.

Questions. Yes.

Q Hi. My name's Ariel (sp). I am a student. And my --

SEC. RUMSFELD: A student of what?

Q High school.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Of what?

Q High school.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Oh, in high school.

Q My government teachers adamantly --

SEC. RUMSFELD: How did you get a ticket? (Laughter.)

Q Bribed the bell hop. (Laughter.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: How?

Q Never mind. (Laughter.) Sometimes if you wear a suit and have a badge -- (light laughter). My government teachers adamantly argue that we're not at war. And I wanted to ask you how you would respond to that. Are we at war, and how is that measured?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, I'm -- I would -- I suppose you'd have to go to the dictionary. And there's no question but that people can characterize the meaning of that word differently. Some people think you're not at war unless there's a declaration of war by the Congress. Others recognize that over many, many years now we haven't had declarations of war by Congress, and we've had a whole series of conflicts where an awful lot of people have been killed, and that has to be one of the characteristics of war.

It seems to me that if someone could be -- if they wanted to, you know, disagree with the word, they can do that. It's hard to find a perfect word to characterize the situation we're in. But the situation we're in is that there are people that are not associated with a country, that do not have armies, navies or air forces, who are determined to kill not soldiers and sailors and Marines, but innocent people as a way of satisfying themselves, or some goal they seem to think is in their interest.

I personally think the word "war" is appropriate. I think that it is something that engages the entire nation. It engages other nations of the world who are vulnerable. There is no way to defend against terrorist acts, because a terrorist can attack at any place at any time using any technique, and it's physically impossible to defend it every time at every place against every technique.

The only way it can be done is to take the battle to those people who are determined to try to kill large numbers of human beings.

So I'd go back to your teacher and tell them, they're wrong. (Laughter; sustained applause.) But you want to do it with a smile. (Laughter.) And I'd wait till you get your grade. (Laughter.)

Yes. Here we go.

Q Thank you, sir. Major Robert Price (sp), National Guard Bureau. My question is about the future role of the National Guard in homeland security. Since September 11th, the National Guard's been engaged in a number of missions, homeland security-type missions, where they remained under the

command and control of their state governors: airport security; the Olympics security. Seemed to go pretty.

So my question is, do you see that as something of a successful model to apply to the future, sort of this centralized federal leadership teamed up with decentralized execution by state governors for the National Guard?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I think it's yet to play out. There's no question but that the Guard and the Reserves as well as active forces are going to have a much more active role in homeland security than at any other time in recent history. And that's because the fact that we have friends on the north and friends on the south and oceans on either side no longer gives us the kind of protection and immunity that we once had from attacks. Given the nature of the world today and the power and reach of weapons, our country is vulnerable. And as a result, the Guard and Reserve will be playing a considerably more active role in homeland security.

But so will our forces. I mean, you think of what we have, these combat air patrols that are flying, are a mixture of active, Guard, Reserves, and there are any number of things. The active forces today, for example, have to do a much better job with respect to force protection in the United States more along the lines that we've had to do previously outside the United States.

So it is -- it is something that we're worrying our way through. I will say this: My goal and my interest is to see that the men and women in uniform who are trained to do military tasks be used as little for non-military tasks as we can manage to do. So each time we have been asked -- for example, very recently, to provide some folks for the airports or for the INS or Customs or Border Patrol -- to the extent the president decides that that needs is now, and the only people around who are disciplined, organized, trained, capable are people in uniform, we go ahead and do it.

But we do it with an understanding that they're not going to do it for very long. We sign a memorandum of understanding so that the organization that has the real responsibility for that -- the airports, it's the Department of Transportation. For Customs or Border Patrol or INS, it's someone else -- we make them sign a memorandum of understanding with a specific amount of time and an understanding that they'll show us the work plan they have to train, organize, equip and actually deploy the people who are going to replace the men and women in uniform who are filling for a brief period -- in some cases 90 days, in some cases 179 days -- a function which is really not military, but which was important to the country, and therefore we agreed to do it for a short period of time. (Applause.)

Q Thank you.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yes, sir.

Is there anyone behind me with their hand up? (Laughter.) No one went to -- (laughter).

You're next, back here.

Q Sir, Commander Charles Stuphard (sp) from the Joint Staff. On that military transformation, where do you see us in terms of quality and quantity?

SEC. RUMSFELD: We're doing that, and kind of an embarrassing thing at the present time, we've got all the senior -- the chiefs, the vice chiefs, the chairmen, the vice chairmen, the secretary, the deputy secretary, all the under secretaries and the assistant secretaries sitting in a room trying to define the word "transformation". So it's kind of like "war". (Laughter.) It's an elusive little dickens. (Laughter.) I am kind of overstating for emphasis.

What we're really doing is we are preparing a discussion, or a briefing, or a paper on the subject of transformation, kind of the same reason you do a budget. Not that you ever live by your budget. It's a vehicle for discussion. It's a way of forcing people to understand what we're doing and where we're going, even though you know that life changes and you have to make adjustments. So what we're doing is we're sitting there as long as it takes to make sure that we all understand what we mean by "transformation".

There are some people who think it -- that transformation is a new weapons system that suddenly is magically going to change the outcome on the battlefield. Some people think it's firing someone who's not transformational, and that's kind of what they're looking for. Still others think that it can be quantified in dollars, and you can look at the budget and say, Well, this portion's transformational and that isn't.

But in point of fact, you are never untransformed and then transformed, because it is a process. It's dynamic.

The world isn't static, the world's dynamic. And that means if you are going to deal with those changes in the world, you've got to have a culture that creates an environment that's hospitable to innovation, that's hospitable to fashioning things in different ways. You might take three legacy systems, three old platforms, and connect them in a way that creates a transformational outcome, if you will.

And therefore I can't answer your question. I can't -- there isn't any way for me to respond to the two words you set up there, because I don't think it's doable. It may be that your teacher could do it, but -- (laughter) -- oh, I hope that teacher's not here. (Laughter.) And anyway, I was just kidding. (Laughter.)

Behind me. Yes?

Q Hello, sir. My name is Dora Jones, and I'm with the Air Force Pentagon Communications Agency. My question, though, is about the reorganization of the Army. I want to go local now.

They're reorganizing within the Department of the Army, and one of the areas that's really going to hit

a lot of people over here at the Pentagon is transportation, because we ride the DOD buses and we use the sedans. One of the areas that they're thinking about cutting now are those bus driver positions and those driver positions. And I was wondering -- you know, since September 11th, a lot more people rely on that service, and I was wondering if you had a thought on why we would be cutting transportation. I know we got to cut something, but you know, why transportation?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Wow. Where's Secretary White when I need him? (Laughter.) I tell you, I will check and find out what the answer to that is, and I just do not know.

I do know that resources are always finite. Trade-offs always have to be made. I don't know quite what you mean by transformation, but if you --

Q Transportation.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Transportation, I mean. But do you mean getting to work or leaving work?

Q No, the bus drivers -- the DOD bus drivers here to transport people back and forth.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Between different facilities and that type of thing?

Q Yes, sir.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yeah. Then I was right; I don't know. (Laughter, applause.)

Right here. Right here.

Q Master Sergeant Velasquez (sp) from -- (inaudible) -- Army Reserve.

Colombia. What kind of support our government is providing to the government of Colombia against the guerrillas; and if in the future we're going to be involved more directly with Colombia?

SEC. RUMSFELD: The situation in Colombia is not good. It has been a democratic country that has not had control over non-trivial portions of the country for many, many years now. It's got serious problems with guerrilla warfare. It's got problems with narcotraffickers. It's got problems with terrorists and hostage-takers that have turned hostage-taking into a business, if you will.

The Congress passed legislation that restricted U.S. government assistance to Colombia -- I'm going to be close -- within 10 percent -- maybe it isn't all restricted -- but for the most part, restricted to things relating to counter-drug. The president very recently, after trying very hard to get cooperation with the so-called -- organization called F-A-R-C, FARC, they -- he left them an area that the government troops did not go into for a period, engaged in a series of negotiations, could not reach resolution,

decided his patience was over, and announced the forces -- the Colombian forces were going to go in. My understanding is that he leaves office within a matter of three, six, eight months, can't succeed himself. There are three or four people who are running. Every one of them agrees with that, that they should not go back and allow that area to be free of the government. So my guess is that no matter who wins the election, there will be a much more aggressive approach on the part of the Colombian government.

What the United States will do is an open question. Right now -- I mean, clearly it's in our interest that that be a democratic country. It's an important country in our hemisphere. We have provided money and people. I think that it's mostly through the Department of State. Colin Powell, I think, has the second-largest air force in North America -- in Colombia of aircraft that have done various counter-drug activities.

We've assisted them with some intelligence gathering. And just to show the difficulty of all of this, the requirements are that if we have an intelligence-gathering mechanism of some sort and we gather information, we're only allowed to give it to them if it has a drug -- anti-drug-related purpose. If it has an anti-revolutionary or an anti-terrorist purpose, we're not allowed to, under the congressional statutes.

If they -- if we provided a helicopter, and they need spare parts, and we're going to provide spare parts, the -- we can't prepare spare parts if the helicopter is going to be used in an antiterrorist or an antirevolutionary or guerrilla activity -- only if it's going to be used in antidrug activity.

Now that's rather constraining. I suspect that, given what's taken place, the Congress will probably address those issues, and the executive branch will and will probably, in the period ahead, see that whatever we do do is -- has greater flexibility so that it can assist the government in trying to restore a -- their country to a democratic nation.

Yes, sir. (Laughter.)

Q Good afternoon, sir. Lieutenant Commander Daniel Steckman (sp). I'm with the Naval Washington Internship Program, currently assigned to OPNAV, political/military section.

And it often appears to me that the American press just doesn't get it, as evidenced by report after report about how best to hurt the American people following 9/11. And the Office of Strategic Influence seems like a good idea on the surface. And I'm wondering why it's necessary to close that down.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, let me say this about that. (Soft laughter.) The Office of Strategic Influence in the policy shop has -- had -- it's now closed -- some excellent people in it doing very good work that needed to be done. There are the kinds of things that this department, as opposed to other agencies of government might do, that this department has to do that involve information operations and strategic

influence, if you want to use that phrase, are many and varied.

During the Afghan experience, we were deeply involved in trying to communicate with the Afghan people, because we know their history of being against foreigners and there we were with people on the ground in their country, and we did not want to end up like the Soviet Union did, where the people were against us, rather than being against Taliban and al Qaeda people who had taken over their country.

So we had a aircraft fly around with -- beaming radio programs to those people explaining that this is not against the Afghan people. It's not a anti-Muslim effort -- the bombing. It is against the al Qaeda and against the Taliban. We dropped humanitarian -- food and meals to the people -- millions of these things. And the Taliban and the al Qaeda were saying that they were poisoned, and so we had to counter that by saying they're not poisoned and finding ways to explain that it was appropriate food for their religion.

We wanted to offer rewards, so we could enlist the Afghan people on our side to try to turn in and find al Qaeda and Taliban leaders, and offer bounties and rewards. So we dropped leaflets and did a whole series of things.

There are any number of things -- when a television network in the Middle East puts out an Osama bin Laden video that has a diatribe that's filled with things that are untrue, someone needs to counter that and say what the truth is.

The reason it's closed is because it was so pounded around in the media that it left people with the impression that the department intended to say things that were not correct to the American people or to the press or to the foreign press, which we do not do. We don't need to do that. As I've explained, what we do need to do is the kinds of things I have said.

The other kinds of things we need to do is not lie to people, which we don't do. It's terribly important this -- that the world, the people understand that when we say something, it's the truth -- and it is -- and that we do not have people in this department out peddling lies.

On the other hand, for example, if there's going to be a -- take this Anaconda exercise. That was in planning for a great many days, and we had people doing things. If you're going to have some of your forces go in and make -- take direct action against a target in Afghanistan, and the best way to go in is from the south, it may very well be that you want to do a series of things to lead them to believe you may be coming in from the north or the east or the west. And that doesn't mean you'd call a press conference and lie. What it means is, you create a pattern of behavior that at worst is confusing for the other side and at best leads them to believe something -- that you're coming from a direction you're not, just to oversimplify it.

Now we do do that, and we better do that. And we can save people's lives by doing that, and we'd be

foolish if we didn't.

But the public impression around the world, it was -- it had been picked up -- because of the way it was savaged, it had been picked as a cause celebre, and it struck me in -- you know, who knows if you're right or wrong? You get up some morning, and you're faced with a set of facts like that, and you either decide to keep the office or close the office.

And my attitude was, look, we don't need that hassle. We don't need people in the world thinking we're lying, because we're not. Why should we take that rap? Close it. We'll keep doing -- as I said to the press, we're going to keep doing the things we have to do. We'll do them in the best way we know how. And we'll continue to tell the truth to the American people and the people of the world. (Applause.)

I had a feeling there was a hand up back there.

Q Thank you, sir. My name is Major Lisa Hummler (sp). I work with the Air Force chief information officer. And my question is, talking about transformation, what other instruments of power, what do we need to do in America to avoid ... more terrorists in the future? Maybe it's not all military. It depends on people in other branches of our government or other services.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, you're right, it is not all military. And the vastly preferred way to deal with this problem is to not have young people enter these madrassa schools and get trained in terrorist activities, but have them go to schools that teach languages and mathematics and things that can enable them to have a useful life.

The truth is that these -- many of these madrassa schools don't teach any subjects that would have any benefit to a person in terms of earning a living or functioning as a citizen of any country in the world. What they train them is in the thinking of the mullah who's in charge of that particular school. And to the extent that person has decided they want to teach them to be terrorists, that's what they teach them. And if they don't have any guidance to go in a different direction, and they don't have a job, and they don't have any real prospects, it's not surprising that people can be influenced. We all know that young people can be influenced.

So what would be preferable is what the president of Pakistan, President Musharraf, is doing. And he is going around to these madrassa schools and he is offering as an alternative to their -- and I hesitate to even call what they're doing a curriculum, whatever it is you'd characterize what they teach as -- he's going around and offering an alternative of -- with money and incentives for them to in fact start teach mathematics and languages and things that will be useful to them in terms of getting a job.

So that is part of, it seems to me, what can be done.

(Pause.) In a very soft voice, I was just told that we should take one more question, and -- and I'm going to get in trouble and take two.

There's one, and there was one way in the back. Start.

Q Sir, Captain Linda Mitchell (sp), Air Force Pentagon Communications Agency. I was thinking about a possible long-term retention tool regarding extended leave or a sabbatical of some sort where you could possibly take leave without pay for, say, a period of up to three, four, maybe five years, or you could go for education, child care, some other personal activity. They do this in the commercial world -- civilian world, I think --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Three or four or five-year sabbatical? (Laughter.) You've got to be kidding. (Laughter, applause.) That's an alternative career! (Laughter.)

Q Well, I could do my master's thesis on it, sir, and send it up to you, if you'd like. (Laughter.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: (Laughs.)

Q I know the Royal Australian Air Force provides this to their people today, actually. And I have talked to a lieutenant colonel who said, Hey, if they offered that, I would sign up for 30 -- 30 years. I know I myself would be happy --

SEC. RUMSFELD: The only thing I can think of that's comparable is if you train to be a naval aviator or a lawyer or a doctor and the government pays for it, I believe you then are required to serve for X number of years thereafter. So you could characterize that as a sabbatical, although I think that academics in colleges who get sabbaticals do whatever it is they wish. And -- yeah, I see. Yeah. (Light laughter.) We've got so many thousand Guard and Reserve that we called up to active duty, and we've got 20-plus thousand people who are serving on active duty who we put stop-losses on and are not allowing out who had planned to go about their business and go become doctors, or take a different vocation, or get married or whatever, and we're keeping them in the service. And I don't think that there's any paper moving in the department to provide for sabbaticals of that length.

Last question.

I mean, myself, I mean.

Yes.

Q Good afternoon, sir. Kevin Andrews from the Directorate of Maintenance.

First, I'd like to say thank you for your straightforward, no-nonsense, cut-through-the-red-tape style of leadership. (Sustained applause, cheers.)

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

I am glad I took two instead of one! (Laughter.)

Q And my question is, what are your top three priorities for the Department of Defense since September 11th?

SEC. RUMSFELD: The first has to be to do everything humanly possible to work with the president and the other departments and agencies to see that we can -- to the extent that it's humanly possible, avoid another terrorist attack on our country, our deployed forces and on our friends and allies.

The second, I would say, would be to try to do something that I did not get around to last year. As you may note, it was not mentioned on my list of things the department did such a good job on. And that's to see if we can't fix the intelligence aspects of our department. I think we can do an awful lot better than we're doing.

And I don't say that to be critical of the people who are doing the intelligence business, but we are living in a world where technology has advanced very rapidly. Because of our open system, it's available to people who don't wish us well. And the power of weapons have become so much greater and the reach of weapons so much greater and yet there is -- it is probably not knowable -- the kinds of things that we need to know may not be knowable for the whole world, but we need to do a much better job of, in the first instance, having the full spectrum of intelligence-gathering capabilities. And my impression is that we've done better with technology than we have with human intelligence gathering.

And second, I think we have to, in the intelligence world, find much better ways to see that the people who need the intelligence have it and that, in fact, it is actionable intelligence. And there's a difference between information that comes through an intelligence channel and is interesting but is not actionable -- that you cannot act off of it in a way that can help protect this country.

And the third thing I would say is a priority has to be the subject of transformation, which we're spending a great deal of time on. And part of that is not just transforming weapons systems and not just transforming the way systems work together and not just improving connectivity and interoperability, but it will be changing a culture. If you look at the budget process and how long it takes from when we starting building a budget until we start spending the money that comes out of the Congress at the other end, if you look at the length of time it takes to acquire a product, a weapon, anything, from the time you start doing it until it ends -- who's an expert here on the F-22? What's it been, underway for 20 years I think. And here we're living in a time when technology is changing every 18, 24 months. We simply can't do that. We can't allow the bigness of this system and its bureaucracies to consume that much time and prevent us from function in a way that is deft and skillful and swift.

The other thing about transformation is -- and a culture is people. We have to have an institution that unusual people are willing to be in. Everyone need not fit exactly the same cookie mold. We have to

find a way that people's creativity and their boldness can be used. I don't think that having people stay in their jobs -- I have to sign off on senior officials, and I've started asking how long they've served an average length of time in a job since their first five or six years in the service. And these are the general officers and admirals. And the numbers are sometimes 22 months at the top. Sometimes they're 18. Sometimes they're 16 months. Sometimes they're 13 1/2 months. If you're in your job that long, you don't know your job. You haven't been there long enough to see your mistakes and have to clean them up. (Applause.)

So those are my three priorities. Thanks for everything you folks do for our country.

(Applause.)

END

<http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/2002/s20020307-secdef.html>