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For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
August 21, 2002

President Discusses Security and Defense Issues

The Governor's House, The Bush Ranch
Crawford, Texas

11:30 P.M. EDT



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President's Remarks

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THE PRESIDENT: Well, good morning. I'm pleased to welcome Secretary Rumsfeld and General Myers and members of his staff here to Crawford to discuss some important issues, issues that relate to the security of the American people.

We spent time talking about missile defense. The progress that our nation is making after our withdrawal from the ABM treaty has been -- is impressive. That the Secretary and his planners are thinking through how best to spend the R&D money so that we can better protect ourselves and our friends and allies from the true threats of the 21st century.

And I appreciated the briefing, Mr. Secretary. I thought it was illuminating. The American people need to know that the Pentagon is forward thinking, is aggressive in its approach to developing systems that will more likely be able to respond to what we're going to face.

Secondly, we talked about contingency plans. One of the jobs of the military is to constantly be thinking about how to respond to an issue should it arise. And I appreciate so very much the Secretary's thinking on that.

And, thirdly, we talked about transformation issues, how best to make the military conform to the threats we face, other than missile defense. What weapons systems, what strategy should be employed, how do we make our services more joint in nature.

The Secretary rightly pointed out that, in the past, the service chief would come with their particular wish list, but there wasn't much coordination as to whether or not a weapons system in the Navy could -- would work jointly with the army, for example. And Secretary Rumsfeld and his team have done a really good job of beginning to shape the philosophy, a new philosophy in the Pentagon.

And it was right here in the Governor's House -- we call this the Governor's House, by the way -- was where he first briefed me on transformation plans nearly a year ago, and he's back to bring me up to date on the progress that the Pentagon is making. And we're making good progress.

The American people need to know that our Secretary of Defense is willing to think differently about how to structure our military and is also willing to work with the joint staff, people in the Pentagon, to get them to think differently. It's not an easy task, but he can be a stubborn guy. But he's got a vision that is positive for the country.

Mr. Secretary, would you like to say a few words? And then we might answer questions. I want to learn how you answer questions. They tell me you're quite good at it. (Laughter.)

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Well, thank you, Mr. President. We were here last year about this time, had an

opportunity to discuss with you and get some guidance as to the period ahead. We've benefitted from that, and we're back to give you a good report and to gain additional guidance for the period coming forward.

We're of course working on the budget bill for the 2004 to 2009 period, even though the 2003 budget is still pending before the Congress. So we have to get that process going. And I felt that we had a very good chance today to discuss missile defense and the important programs that we have going forward for transformation.

The cold, hard fact is that the United States lives in a very different security environment today in this 21st century than we did prior to September 11th. We have the task in the Department of Defense of seeing that we're able to provide the kind of defense capabilities and deterrents that will enable our country to contribute to peace and stability and to protect the American people.

And that means we have got to shift this department and see that we have the kinds of capabilities that fit for the challenges and the threats that exist in the 21st century. It's a big job but we've got a good team of people and we're working hard on it and we thank you for your support.

THE PRESIDENT: You're probably wondering why the Secretary is wearing a suit. Would you like to explain why you're wearing a suit?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: I don't have any sport clothes. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: He's going to Fort Hood to talk to our troops, to thank them for their service and, Mr. Secretary, I appreciate -- yes.

Q Sir, after you've studied today the military capabilities of the United States and looking ahead to future threats, one thing that has to factor in is the growing number of U.S. allies, Russia, Germany, Bahrain, now Canada, who say that if you go to war with Saddam, you're going to go alone.

Does the American military have the capability to prosecute this war alone?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, look, if you're asking -- are you asking about Iraq? The subject didn't come up in this meeting.

But, having said that, we take all threats seriously and we will continue to consult with our friends and allies.

I know there is this kind of intense speculation that seems to be going on, a kind of a -- I don't know how you would describe it. It's kind of a churning --

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Frenzy.

THE PRESIDENT: Frenzy is how the Secretary would describe it. But the subject didn't come up.

We will obviously continue to consult with our friends and allies. Your question makes certain assumptions that may or may not be true. But we will continue to talk with our -- with the people concerned about peace and how to secure the peace, and those are needed consultations.

Not only will we consult with friends and allies, we'll consult with members of Congress.

Yes, Terry.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Could I just add a comment there, Mr. President? I think it's worth noting on that particular subject, that the President of the United States and the Secretary of State and our country has put together a coalition that stretches across the entire globe that is addressing the problem of the global war on terrorism. It is 80 or 90 countries. There are 37 or 38 down in Tampa, Florida, with liaison officers. We have,

at any given time, 18, 20, a couple dozen of countries involved in Afghanistan participating.

The coalition that is working on the global war on terrorism that the President and the Secretary have put together is broad, it's deep, it's impressive, and it is in fact what is helping the forward progress that we're achieving, the traction that we're getting with respect to dealing with the terrible, terribly difficult problem of global terrorist networks.

Q Still, many of those are now saying that they won't take the war against terror into Iraq. What do you do about that?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: The President has not asked them to.

Q Sir, if I could follow up?

THE PRESIDENT: Please do.

Q General Franks today --

THE PRESIDENT: We're in the giving spirit here.

Q Thank you, sir.

THE PRESIDENT: General Franks today?

Q He has said that he is drawing up war plans to provide you with credible options. Now, should the American people conclude from that that you're reaching some critical point, that a decision is imminent?

THE PRESIDENT: First of all, in the midst of the frenzy -- (laughter) -- I want you to note that General Franks is not here. General Franks is doing his job. And one of the jobs that the Secretary of Defense has tasked to members of his general staff is to prepare for all contingencies, whether it be in the particular country that you seem to be riveted on, or any other country, for that matter.

We face a -- the world is not stable. The world changes. There are -- this terrorist network is global in nature and they may strike anywhere. And, therefore, we've got to be prepared to use our military and all the other assets at our disposal in a way to keep the peace. So General Franks is doing what the Secretary has asked.

Would you like to comment on that?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: I would. As the President indicated, one of the things we discussed here today was the contingency planning guidance that he signed. I then meet with all of the combatant commanders for every area of responsibility across the globe. I do it on a regular basis. We go over all the conceivable contingencies that could occur.

So General Franks, as well as every other combatant commander -- I met, I think, within the last 30 days with at least three of them on various types of contingency plans in totally different parts of the world. That's my job. That's their job, is to see that we have the ability to protect the American people and deal effectively on behalf of our friends and our allies and our deployed forces.

So it is their task to work with me and ultimately with the President as the chain of command goes from the Commander-in-Chief, the President of the United States, to me, to the combatant commanders. And they're doing exactly what I've asked them to do and what the President has asked me to do.

Q Now that you're out of the ABM treaty, can you talk a little bit about what type of testing you'd like to do on missile defense, what kind of testing we'll see soon?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Sure, we're doing it all the time. We're testing a layered program which involves a terminal phase, mid-course, as well as boost phase. It is a -- a program that will become layered. It will start out as a testbed and then evolve over time.

We've had some very good successes with both short-range missiles as well as longer range missiles, intercepting them. And I feel very good about the program. General Ron Kadish is doing a superb job for the country.

Q When do you expect there will be the kind of missile defense shield that you'd like to see?

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: You see, that's not knowable. And first of all, the word "shield," we don't use. The program that we're designing -- I thought you said "shield." Oh, you didn't?

Q No.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Excuse me.

Q Just kidding. (Laughter.)

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: The wind --

THE PRESIDENT: You thought "shield."

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Yes, I thought "shield."

We think of it as a capability that would be broad and be able to deal with relatively limited numbers of ballistic missiles and also shorter range -- medium and shorter range missiles. And the shorter range defenses are more advanced.

In terms of how long it would take, it's something that really is not knowable, because you're in the research, development and testing phase. And as that continues to succeed and be -- to work out, we then will put things in place and they will evolve over a period of time.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I think the other thing that you should note is that the Secretary is -- and his team are briefing our friends and allies about progress we're making. That's one of the things I said when we withdrew from the ABM treaty, that we would consult with our friends and allies. And we are. And I appreciate those consultations. I think it's very important for people to see what is possible as we -- as we make the world more secure through our research and development.

Q Mr. President, Abu Nidal. Can we have your reaction to reports of his death?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first of all, no terrorist can hide forever. Secondly, it's -- I found it interesting that they said he committed suicide with four bullet -- four bullet wounds to the head. And so I'm not exactly sure how he died. We just have to wait and make sure in fact he did die.

But the point is, is that when the world puts their mind to fighting terror, we can rout out these terrorists. And some of them will be able to hide longer than others and some of them will be able to survive longer than others. But this country will continue to lead the coalition that the Secretary of Defense talked about, to hunt them down one by one. And that's a positive development.

Adam. Don't worry about the suit here on the Ranch.

Q Sorry, I saw the Secretary --

SECRETARY RUMSFELD: You look good.

Q I borrowed your clothes. (Laughter.)

Considering how much discussion has been going on recently about Saddam, do you feel a need to get out there and make a case for toppling him? And, if so, do you feel a need to do it before Election Day?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, Adam, what I need to do is to continue to, as we call it, consult with people who share our interests to make the world a safer place, and I will do so. The American people know my position, and that is, is that regime change is in the interests of the world. How we achieve that is a matter of consultation and deliberative -- deliberation, which I do, I'm a deliberate person.

I say it in my speeches, which you fortunately don't have to cover, that I'm a patient man. And when I say I'm a patient man, I mean I'm a patient man, and that we will look at all options and we will consider all technologies available to us and diplomacy and intelligence.

But one thing is for certain, is that this administration agrees that Saddam Hussein is a threat and he will be -- that's a part of our thinking. And that hasn't changed.

Nothing he has done has convinced me -- I'm confident the Secretary of Defense -- that he is the kind of fellow that is willing to forgo weapons of mass destruction, is willing to be a peaceful neighbor, that is -- will honor the people -- the Iraqi people of all stripes, will -- values human life. He hasn't convinced me, nor has he convinced my administration.

Listen, thank you all for coming out on a windy, hot day. Fine looking boots, Martha.

Q Thank you, sir. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: I expect to see you barrel riding here at the Crawford --

Q Waiting for the invitation.

THE PRESIDENT: That's good.

Thank you all very much. See you tomorrow on the plane.

END 11:45 A.M. CDT

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