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TESTIMONY OF THE HONORABLE DONALD H. RUMSFELD
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
BEFORE THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING, ROOM 2118
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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee.

I am joined today by:

- General Myers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff;
- General John Abizaid, Commander of U.S. Central Command; and
- General George Casey, Commander of the Multi-National Force in Iraq.

These general officers are doing an outstanding job and our nation is truly fortunate to have their able service. And I am grateful and proud to be serving with them.

One year after World War II ended -- a leading news magazine published an article about post-war reconstruction efforts in Germany. It was entitled: "*Americans are Losing the Victory in Europe.*"

The author despairingly wrote:

> "Never has American prestige in Europe been lower. People never tire of telling you of the ignorance and rowdy-ism of American troops, of our misunderstanding of European conditions."

The year was 1946. But consider how different 1946 looks to us today. In retrospect, it was not a time to despair but to build as they did.

Now it has been one year since the turnover of sovereignty to the liberated Iraqi people. And just as Europe was a central battlefield -- ideological and military -- in the war against Communist aggression, so too the Middle East and Central Asia are the centers of gravity in today's struggle against violent extremism.

And I know the American people still have the same determination and resolve. They know today as then that these struggles are not won on defense, they are won on offense.

The task is to help more people understand the nature of this struggle we are in. Violent extremists have made clear their intentions: It is to kill as many Westerners and moderate Muslims as possible.

They have access to money, and to weapons -- and they are seeking even more dangerous weapons. They are surveying and targeting landmarks in our country.

They have to be stopped. And together with the world we must find ways to encourage any would-be recruits to choose a better path.

Our nation's actions to liberate Afghanistan and Iraq have:

- Eliminated two state sponsors of terrorism;
- Most certainly contributed to Libya's decision to open its nuclear weapons programs to international inspection and renounce terrorism; and
- Encouraged democratic movements in regions that have long been breeding grounds for violent anti-Western extremism.

It is not surprising that there are questions about the situation in Iraq today. That has always been the case in a time of war. It was true in Washington's time, and Lincoln's time, and Roosevelt's to be sure.

Today the questions I hear are something like this:

- Is the effort underway in Iraq worth the cost and the sacrifice?
- How are the Coalition and the new Iraqi government really doing?
- When will Iraqi security forces be able to assume full responsibility for securing their country? and
- What happens next, and should Congress set a timetable to withdraw?

I will comment on each of these questions.

First, whether the effort underway in Iraq is worth the costs.

It was not long ago, there was relatively little disagreement -- either here at home, or in the United Nations -- as to the danger the former Iraqi regime posed to the region and the world.

The only question then was how long the United Nations should wait for Iraq to comply with the 17 Security Council Resolutions it had defied.

By contrast it is important to note what success will mean.

Specifically, a free, democratic and peaceful Iraq:

- Will <u>not</u> provide aid to violent extremists;
- It will <u>not</u> plot the assassination of American presidents;
- It will <u>not</u> invade or fire missiles at its neighbors; and
- It will <u>not</u> use chemical weapons on its neighbors or its own people.

Let there be no doubt: If the Coalition were to leave before the Iraqi security forces are able to assume responsibility -- which we must not do -- we would one day again have to confront another Iraqi regime -- perhaps even more dangerous than the last -- in a region plunged into darkness, rather than bathed in the light of freedom.

Americans ask: how are we doing in Iraq?

The President's strategy is clear -- to empower the democratically elected Iraqi government:

- To aggressively go after the insurgents and terrorists -- and that is exactly what their forces are doing with solid success;
- To pursue an inclusive constitutional political process;
- To improve public services and, with the help of the international community, improve the quality of life for the Iraqi people; and
- To enable Iraq's security forces to take charge of their own country.

Each of these strategies depends on the others. Success will require patience and progress on each of the four.

But consider what has been accomplished in Iraq in 12 months time -- not 12 years, but 12 months:

- More than 8 million people defied terrorists' threats and voted in the January election;
- Duly elected Iraqi leaders, are drafting a Constitution to be voted on by the Iraqi people by October 15, 2005. Under their new Constitution, a permanent government will be elected on December 15, 2005;
- Iraqis are building an economy and it is growing -- with a stock market and a stable currency;
- While the insurgency remains dangerous in parts of Iraq, Coalition and Iraqi operations are disrupting terrorist sanctuaries, such as Fallujah, and keeping them on the run;
- U.S. forces are capturing or killing hundreds of violent extremists on a daily basis and confiscating literally mountains of weapons.

The general officers here today are leading the troops that are contributing to these achievements. They are prepared to provide a detailed report on the progress of Iraq's security forces.

The number of U.S. troops in Iraq has moved from the Iraqi election high of 160,000 to less than 140,000 currently. But their priorities have shifted -- from conducting security operations to a heavier focus on training, equipping, and assisting the Iraqi forces.

In the past, the performance of Iraqi security forces has been criticized for being mixed. But consider that:

- Two years ago, few Iraqi forces had critical equipment such as radios, vehicles or body armor. Today, the vast majority of Iraqi security forces have this equipment;
- The Iraqis had an inexperienced military chain of command and weak ministries of Defense and Interior. Today, both are improving, but they have a way to go;
- They had weak unit cohesion and insufficient mid-level leadership. Today, leaders at all levels are stepping forward;
- A year ago, six Iraqi Army battalions were in training. Today, dozens of trained battalions are capable of conducting anti-insurgent operations with Coalition support;
- Large sections of the country, including much of the north and south, are relatively peaceful and essentially under the control of Iraqi security forces; and

- Responsibility for what had been one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in Baghdad was recently turned over to the Iraqi security forces, and has been relatively free of serious violence.

Don't believe it when you were told the Iraqi security forces can't cut it. They can and they are, to their credit.

Finally, the question is asked: when can the Coalition leave? And should Congress establish a deadline to withdraw?

Some in Congress have suggested that deadlines be set for withdrawal. That would be a terrible mistake. It would throw a lifeline to terrorists who in recent months have suffered significant losses in casualties, been denied havens, and suffered weakened popular support.

Let me be clear: the United States made a commitment to finish the job and we must do so. Timing in war is never predictable -- there are no guarantees. We can and will prevail, but only if we persevere. Any who say we have lost or are losing are flat wrong. We are not.

Coalition military personnel are in Iraq at the request of the Iraqi government and consistent with U.N. Security Council Resolution 1546. The objectives of the overwhelming majority of Iraqis and the Coalition are the same: a peaceful and prosperous Iraq with a representative government. Even today, that is a radical notion in the Middle East. And the fact that that is a new approach is going to result in occasional confusion, resistance, and difficulties. We understand that.

Iraq was a violent place long before its liberation, and there may undoubtedly be some violence in Iraq after Coalition forces depart. But success in this effort cannot be defined as domestic tranquility. Rather, success will be when there is a free Iraq, where Iraqis are the guarantors of their own security, with minimal Coalition involvement. And that will be a truly historic accomplishment.

The amount of time this will take is not knowable.

The timing must be condition based. It will depend on:

- The extent to which various ethnic factions reconcile -- and they are now doing so in impressive ways;
- The level of support from the international community -- and it is growing. The U.N. and NATO, for example, are increasing their commitments. And the international conference on Iraq that recently took place in Brussels elicited strong political statements of support for the emerging Iraqi democracy;
- And the timing will also depend on Iraq's neighbors, whose behavior continues to be unhelpful.

Insurgents continue to come into Iraq from Syria and Iran. Nations that serve as conduits for mass murderers are not friends of the Iraqi people, or of the United States, or of the civilized world.

One final point. Someone recently asked me about the differences between my current tenure as Secretary of Defense and my previous tenure some 30 years ago. One thing that has remained the same is the tendency in some quarters to blame America for the world's troubles.

Well, I'm not one who wakes up every morning seeking ways to suggest that America is what's wrong with the world. The people who are going on television chopping off people's heads or using disabled children as suicide bombers -- they are what's wrong with the world. The violent extremists that killed 3000 innocent men, women and children on September 11th are what's wrong with the world.

In every war, there are individuals who commit wrongdoing. And there are mistakes, setbacks, and hardships.

Recently the noted historian and author, David McCullough, recalled the year 1776 as "the most important year in the most important conflict in our history." He said:

> "If it had been covered by the media and the country had seen how horrible the conditions were . . . and what a very serious soup we were in, I think that would have been it."

Similarly in 1864, many -- including President Lincoln himself -- believed he would lose the upcoming election due in part to the slew of criticisms he received for his prosecution of the Civil War. Speaking to an Ohio regiment, President Lincoln said:

> "I wish it might be more generally and universally understood what the country is now engaged in. There may be mistakes made sometimes; and things may be done wrong, while the officers of the Government do all they can to prevent mistakes. But I beg of you, as citizens of this great Republic, not to let your minds be carried off from the great work we have before us."

That was sound advice then -- and it is wise counsel today.

Today's servicemen and women, like the generations before them, are performing noble work. Though some pundits and observers -- non-participants -- have criticized the American military with irresponsible comparisons and purple rhetoric, those of us who work with the men and women in the U.S. Armed Forces know otherwise.

Our fellow citizens in uniform serve with great compassion and professionalism amid danger and provocation. We should not allow the actions of a few to distract us from the mission we face. Or from the necessity to succeed.

To all U.S. military personnel, to their families who sacrifice while Guardsmen and Reservists are deployed in battle, I offer my fullest appreciation.

And one day, all those who have made sacrifices on behalf of this cause -- and the American people who support their important work -- will find a place of honor in our country's history and they will have won the appreciation and respect that they have richly earned.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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