



2/20/2003
Donald Rumsfeld
Interview
The NewsHour - PBS

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Lehrer: And now to the Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.

Mr. Secretary, welcome.

Rumsfeld: Thank you.

Lehrer: No breakthrough yet on the Turkish bases situation; is that right?

Rumsfeld: That's correct.

Lehrer: What's the problem? Is it money?

Rumsfeld: Well, no. It's the fact that Turkey is a democracy. It has a relatively new government. It is wrestling with a whole set of issues, and the reality is that what the United States has asked of Turkey is significant. And so they need time to think it through and talk to their parliament and give consideration to it. I suspect in the day or two immediately ahead, why we'll have some sort of an answer, and in the last analysis, Turkey is our ally in NATO. Turkey is participating now in Operation Northern Watch, where we have coalition aircraft in Turkey that monitors the northern portion of Iraq. And they have been helpful in a number of ways.

Lehrer: What would not having access to their bases do to a potential military action against Iraq?

Rumsfeld: Well, I don't think that's really the issue, whether we'll have access to their bases, and whether we'll be able to overfly and those types of things. We already have that for Operation Enduring Freedom, the global war on terror. I think the real issue they're considering now is the extent to which they want to increase that to permit larger numbers of heavier troops to come in from the north in the event that the decision is made that force is necessary to disarm Saddam Hussein.

Lehrer: But if you don't have the 40,000 troops, what I've been reading, there's 40,000 troops that the U.S. wants to put into the northern boundary through Turkey for potential conflict with Iraq, if you can't do it that way, what I'm asking is --

Rumsfeld: We'll do another way.

Lehrer: You'll do it another way. And it still can be done, and it's not going to upset things. I just -- did you read the New York Times? The New York Times quoted a White House spokesman, a White House person this morning as saying that this was extortion in the name of alliance, that's what Turkey was up to. Do you agree with that?

Rumsfeld: No. I don't. I mean, I think what it is, is a democratic country going through the whole series of questions as to what they think their role ought to be. And I think that's fair. These are tough issues that countries are wrestling with. I think that's not the way I would characterize it.

Lehrer: The Turkey problem aside, is the U.S. military ready to go against Iraq?

Rumsfeld: Yes.

Lehrer: In general terms, I know you don't like to talk specifics, but in general terms, what is the force that's ready to go?

Rumsfeld: I would characterize it as ample. The United States at the president's request decided that as the diplomacy took place in the world, and in the United Nations, that it was important to begin flowing forces to support that diplomacy. And we've had many, many weeks now to do that. The United Kingdom has had many, many weeks to do that. Other countries have taken steps to deploy various types of assets. NATO did this last week, deployed some capability to Turkey, for example. Other countries have been deploying things like chemical and biological detection units to Kuwait. So a number of countries have been flowing capabilities and forces into that region. And there has been a good deal of time, so we are at a point where, if the president makes that decision, the Department of Defense is prepared and has the capabilities and the strategy to do that.

Lehrer: In general terms of the figures, 150,000 troops, five aircraft battle groups, and heavy bombers, is that roughly it from the U.S. point of view?

Rumsfeld: I won't do numbers.

Lehrer: Okay. That's the conventional wisdom that's in every story.

Rumsfeld: That doesn't make it so.

Lehrer: I know.

Rumsfeld: You know the old rule. People who don't know talk, and people who know don't talk.

Lehrer: Okay. But, are these -- are there limits to how long these American forces can remain ready to go?

Rumsfeld: Well, there's obviously a preference. You don't ramp up to a high level and sustain it for a long period easily. What you have to do is rotate capabilities in and out over time.

Lehrer: We keep hearing that the time is running out to keep these forces ready. Is that true?

Rumsfeld: Well, the way to think of it, it seems to me, is the way the president put it, and that is that it's been 12 years, and what's being tested now is not whether or not inspectors can go in and find weapons of mass destruction, that's not what inspectors are for. They're not finders or discoverers. What's being tested now is whether or not Saddam Hussein is going to cooperate. And it doesn't take a lot of time to determine whether or not Saddam Hussein is going to cooperate. So, once the construct of that issue is placed properly before the world, it seems to me the answer gets increasingly clear. We've now had 17 resolutions. It's been 12 years. They've tried diplomacy. The world has tried economic sanctions. The world has tried military activity in the northern and southern no fly zones. At some point, why the time runs out. And that's what the president has said.

Lehrer: I didn't make my question clear. I meant, is there a time element involved in keeping those thousands of troops, how many ever there are, and bombers and hardware, at a state of readiness before they have to stand down, that's what I meant?

Rumsfeld: Well, as I say, it costs money. It keeps people away from their homes and families, and their jobs in the case of Guard and Reserve. So, obviously, your first choice is not to flow forces and then sustain them there for one, two, three, four years, whatever, another 12. There has to be some end to these things. Either you use them or you bring them back.

Lehrer: Well, let's talk about that a moment. Do you feel that just having this large force that you outlined in general terms is a momentum for war in and of itself, just because they're there, they must be used?

Rumsfeld: No, I don't. What I think of them as, Saddam Hussein was ignoring the United Nations for the past period of years. Saddam Hussein is not ignoring the United Nations today. He's not cooperating, but he's not ignoring them. Inspectors are back in there. They're not being cooperated with, so they're not finding much. But the only reason Saddam Hussein has changed at all is because of the flow of forces, and the threat of force.

Lehrer: What would be your, as Secretary of Defense, what would be your position on pulling those troops back and bringing them back home? In other words, if there was a peaceful solution to this, I've heard what you said that you don't think that's going to happen, he isn't cooperating, but if something pulls, if somebody pulls something out of a hat, is it -- what's the downside of bringing all those people back home and all that equipment?

Rumsfeld: Well, I think there -- I still -- I mean, everyone agrees, the last choice is to use force and have a war. They are dangerous things, people get killed. Unforeseen things happen. There still is at least a remote possibility that he could decide to leave the country at some point. To the extent he is persuaded that it's inevitable, that he's going to lose his position, and his regime is going to be cast out, it's at least possible. Was it 1 percent? I don't know. But it's not zero percent that he might leave. The second possibility is that the people in Iraq might decide he should leave and help him. So that's a possibility.

If that happens, if that were to happen, as remote as it may be, it would only happen because the people in Iraq, he or the people around him who decide they prefer he not be there, were persuaded that it was inevitable that he was going to go either voluntarily or involuntarily.

Lehrer: And would it be your positions that, hey, look, we won a war without having to fight it?

Rumsfeld: Oh, my goodness, that would be -- everyone's first choice would be to not have to have a conflict.

Lehrer: You do understand that people believe there is not a -- as you know, this is a matter of public debate, that people think, oh, my goodness, President Bush and Secretary Rumsfeld have all these forces there now, and they feel obligated to use them. You're saying that is not the case?

Rumsfeld: No, the president's determination, and I work for the president, his determination is that Iraq be disarmed. His first choice is that it be done voluntarily. The Iraqi regime refuses to cooperate with the inspectors, and with the United Nations. They have for many, many years.

Your second choice would be that the regime leaves, voluntarily or involuntarily.

The last choice would be that the regime has to be thrown out, and the president is determined that if that's necessary, he will lead a coalition of a large number of countries and do that.

Lehrer: Let's talk about that option. How would you describe the mission? If in fact it comes to military action, and those people, those Americans and the others who are standing by have to actually take military action, what's the goal, what's the mission?

Rumsfeld: The mission would be to invade the country, make it very clear that the purpose was, number one, to change that regime, and disarm the country. That the purpose is to disarm the country of weapons of mass destruction, and it would be done in a certain way, adhering to certain principles. And the principles would be that when that regime was gone, the new government of Iraq, and it would be an Iraq that would be for the Iraqi people. It wouldn't be a regime, you know, determined from outside of Iraq.

But it would be a single country, it would be a country with no weapons of mass destruction. It would be a country that did not threaten its neighbors. It would be a country where the people of that country, the ethnic minorities and the religious minorities, would have a voice in their government. And that there would be some process, and the sooner the better, that Iraqi people could govern themselves. The oil is the oil of the Iraqi people. And this speculation around that somebody is interested in their oil is nonsense. That oil belongs to the Iraqi people, and it will be important for the Iraqi people.

Lehrer: On the combat itself, are you planning, are you and your folks planning for a ferocious war where -- I mean, an all-out defense by the Iraqi military when the U.S. comes in, and when the others come in?

Rumsfeld: The task of war planners is to plan for every conceivable contingency. And they are doing that, from the most pessimistic to the most optimistic.

Lehrer: Is it likely that -- the Gulf War spoiled everybody, of course, most of the Iraqi military threw down their arms and surrendered. Are you expecting that to happen again?

Rumsfeld: Oh, I would expect that there would be Iraqi forces that would surrender rather rapidly. Their morale is not high. They also have lived under Saddam Hussein, and know what kind of a person he is.

Lehrer: Is that a central part of your planning? Does that have to happen for this to be successful?

Rumsfeld: No, no. Absolutely not. No, as I say, General Franks and his planners have developed plans that will address the wide variety of contingencies.

Lehrer: What about the use of chemical and biological weapons --

Rumsfeld: Including that.

Lehrer: -- including against our folks.

Rumsfeld: They've looked at the risk that Saddam Hussein, which says they have no chemical and biological weapons, of course, would use biological and chemical weapons against U.S. forces, he could use them against neighboring countries, like Kuwait, or Jordan, or Turkey, or Israel. They could also use them against their own population, and blame them on the United States and coalition forces, they've done that before. So there are a variety of ways they could use chemical or biological weapons.

Lehrer: Do you expect them to do it?

Rumsfeld: What we expect is that it's our job to be prepared for any conceivable contingency. And, therefore, all the way from that unhappy thought, and dangerous thought, all the way over to catastrophic success, where so many people surrender so fast that the task becomes very quickly humanitarian assistance, and medical assistance, and water, and those types of things. So, they have developed contingency plans for the full spectrum of contingencies.

Lehrer: What do you expect the Iraqi civilians to do? To treat American troops as liberators or as conquerors?

Rumsfeld: Well, I suppose we'll get that across the spectrum as well. Certainly the people that are close in to Saddam Hussein would know that their future is not bright. The people who are engaged in managing or using weapons of mass destruction would have to know that their future would be bleak.

On the other hand, people who surrender, and people who recognize that resistance is not wise, that it's inevitable that the United States and the coalition forces would prevail, and acquiesce in that would be treated quite differently.

Lehrer: Do you expect the invasion, if it comes, to be welcomed by the majority of the civilian population of Iraq?

Rumsfeld: There's obviously the Shia population in Iraq and the Kurdish population in Iraq have been treated very badly by Saddam Hussein's regime, they represent a large fraction of the total. There is no question but that they would be welcomed. Go back to Afghanistan, the people were in the streets playing music, cheering, flying kites, and doing all the things that the Taliban and the Al-Qaeda would not let them do. Saddam Hussein has one of the most vicious regimes on the face of the earth. And the people know that.

Now, is there a risk when that dictatorial system isn't there that there could be conflicts between elements within the country, get even type things, yes. And we've got to be careful to see that that doesn't happen.

Lehrer: What about just the basic idea that they've been told for years that the Americans are the infidels. I mean, it would be like welcoming Hitler into Chicago if he had taken over. I mean, is that not --

Rumsfeld: Jim.

Lehrer: No, no, I'm just saying, we're the enemy.

Rumsfeld: My goodness. That's a terrible thought.

Lehrer: I know, I know. But isn't that --

Rumsfeld: If a politician had said that, they'd get in trouble.

Lehrer: I know. But, I'm just saying, is your planning, the war plan based on the idea that the Iraqi people are going to welcome American troops and American invasion?

Rumsfeld: Contingency planning is based on a full spectrum of possibilities, and that is one, and there are others at the other end of the spectrum that are less happy. And the plans have been prepared to deal with that full range of possibilities. But, to suggest that a war plan depends on one of them happening would be wrong.

Lehrer: It's been suggested that you are emphasizing only the upside of this, and that you haven't talked publicly about, hey, wait a minute, they may not -- they may resist, they may do this, they may do that, thousands and thousands of people could die, including a lot of Americans. Do you feel that this has been -- that the American people have been told enough about the possibilities for the downside of this kind of conflict?

Rumsfeld: I think the downsides have been widely discussed. I mean, I prepared a list of things that could be very unpleasant back in September or October, and I've added to the list. And

everyone who works with me has seen the list, including the president, and the National Security Council, and they know that there are a full range of things that can be unfortunate, and make life very difficult. And we've heard them all, the use of weapons of mass destruction, the possibility of firing ballistic missiles and chemical weapons into neighboring countries, the possibility that one ethnic group in the country could take advantage of disorder and attack another ethnic group, the possibility of using chemicals against his own people, the possibility of fortress Baghdad, and urban conflict. It goes on and on, flooding, the possibility of flooding. There are any number of things that can go wrong. Now, there are also a number of things that can go right, and what one has to do is to look at them all with a cold eye, and be very clear that you've simply got to be prepared to deal with all of them. And that is what General Franks and his team have been doing. And he's doing a superb job for the country.

Lehrer: You mentioned yourself the possibility of a humanitarian crisis that could come. Does your -- is the intelligence been saying -- it's been written up in the papers that Saddam Hussein may intentionally try to starve his people, may intentionally set the oil fields afire, may intentionally do all kinds of things to create a humanitarian crisis, a chaos for his own people. Are we prepared to deal with that?

Rumsfeld: We are certainly organized, and have thought through what we would do in each instance where we have either imagined or seen intelligence that suggests that that regime might do one or more of those things.

Lehrer: And there are a lot of what they call -- the private aid groups have been on this program and elsewhere saying that there has been very little coordination with them from the U.S. government, they're prepared to help out and all that, and they're waiting for the calls. Are you all talking to them, are your folks talking to them?

Rumsfeld: Yes, there are interagency groups in the United States government who have been planning the civil side, a post Saddam Hussein Iraq. That is to say, what do you do about food, what do you do about water, what do you do about medicine. And they have been working for weeks, and they have been coordinating with international groups. Indeed, there have been stockpiles of various types of humanitarian assistance that have already begun to flow into the region, and there's no question but that the United States military is prepared to participate and help international organizations, including the United Nations are already storing materials, and I think probably the information you have is out of date.

Lehrer: Okay. All right. Are you concerned about how just the prospect of going to war is dividing the world?

Rumsfeld: Well, you always would want unanimity in anything, and of course, the president is not decided to go to war. So --

Lehrer: I'm saying, just the prospect of it.

Rumsfeld: I understand. You'd always prefer that everyone agree, and yet, you say, dividing the world. I don't know that I would say that. I think that if I were to look at the globe and countries on earth, I would find people in almost every country who agree, and people who didn't agree. And you'd find in Europe the eight countries signed a letter supporting the president, then ten countries signed a letter supporting the president. The U.N. Security Council voted unanimously to support the resolution, 17th Resolution on Iraq, Resolution 1441. So to say that it's dividing the world, I think is a bit of an overstatement. There are an awful lot more people who didn't demonstrate than who demonstrated. And demonstrations occur in democracies, that's what we do. We have free speech, and that's fine, and that's fair. And these are tough issues. These are not easy issues. The idea of having to think about the prospects of the use of chemical or biological weapons by a terrorist state, or by a terrorist network, killing hundreds of thousands of

people is not a nice thing to think about. And it's not something that people immediately say, well, we have to avoid that. We have to think about that a while.

Lehrer: But, it has not given you any pause at all to consider whether or not, the numbers you just laid out, that aside, that the message as to why this military action may have to be taken has not gotten through to everyone. You feel it so strongly, clearly, so does the president, so do a lot of other people, Tony Blair, others, and yet it hasn't gotten through to a lot of other folks. Does that not concern you, bother you?

Rumsfeld: Of course, you always would prefer everyone agree. But, I've never seen a situation where everyone agreed. In democracies everyone never agrees. And it doesn't mean that someone is right, and someone is wrong, it means that in my mind, at least, it means that in this instance these are difficult issues for people to wrap their heads around. And yet, the risk of being wrong, the risk of inaction, there's risks to action, and you've been discussing them at length here, there are also risks to inaction, 3,000 people were killed in the United States on September 11th in a very conventional, unconventionally delivered, but a conventional attack. If that had been chemical weapons or biological weapons it might not have been 3,000, it could have been 30,000, or 300,000, or a million, and we know that, and the world has to think about that. Now, there's a big effort going on in the Congress to try to connect the dots, who knew what before September 11th, what could you have known, a phone call here, a credit card there, someone taking flying lessons, how do you connect those dots. How many countries would have anticipated in trying to stop that before it happened, based on that fragmentary information? And yet, we had Secretary Powell's powerful presentation to the United Nations, laying out the case as to what the Iraqi government has been doing.

Lehrer: As you know, they're all over you in Europe and elsewhere, because of remarks you made about Germany, and France, and all of that, and they're suggesting that you, above a lot of others, really are not that concerned about what the governments --

Rumsfeld: I am concerned. I mean, I just went over to Munich and spoke to their Kunde conference, the security conference, and met with all of those folks. Needless to say you're concerned. You want as many people as possible to agree with you. And the president has taken it to the United Nations. I keep reading things like, unilateral, I can't make a prediction, but I'll bet anything there is at least a 50/50 chance that there would be more countries, if the decision is made, that there would be more countries supporting the United States and the coalition of the willing, with the United Kingdom and other countries in this coalition than there were in the Gulf War in 1991. So the charge of unilateral just isn't right. The allegation that the United States has an issue with Europe isn't right. The issue in Europe is between Europeans. It's basically between France, Germany, and the rest of Europe.

Lehrer: What's your own view about the positions of France and Germany on this?

Rumsfeld: I think they're democracies, they have to decide what they want to decide. They're sovereign countries. People elected those people to office, that's what they think, and that's life. But, the idea that therefore there is a split between the United States and Europe I think is a misunderstanding. There is a split between most of the European countries, the eight and the ten, and France and Germany.

Lehrer: But, there's also a split between the United States and France, and Germany, as well.

Rumsfeld: But, not with the 18 countries of Europe.

Lehrer: No, but there is with France and Germany.

Rumsfeld: On this issue, and we're allies in NATO.

Lehrer: Do you think that's all it is, is this issue?

Rumsfeld: Well, certainly that's all it is today. I mean, I think they made a mistake on Turkey, and I think they've corrected it now. They opposed sending defensive capabilities, chemical and biological detection units to Turkey, in the North Atlantic Council, and since then they've permitted it to happen, and they've since been deployed. So I think they've changed their position on that, which is a good thing.

Lehrer: Do you think eventually they could even change their position on military action?

Rumsfeld: I don't know. I wouldn't want to predict. Of course, you know, things change, times change, if the inspectors found something that was disturbing to them, I just don't know what will happen. We would much prefer that Germany and France were in agreement.

Lehrer: But, it's not necessary?

Rumsfeld: Well, you'd prefer it. The president has indicated that he will -- if Saddam Hussein doesn't cooperate, and he doesn't flee, and he isn't removed, and he is -- the president is determined to see that he is disarmed, then he will lead, as he said, a coalition of willing countries, and it will be a large coalition. There will be a lot of countries.

Lehrer: Mr. Secretary, thank you very much.

Rumsfeld: Thank you.