



NEWSMAKER: DONALD RUMSFELD

September 18, 2002



As the United Nations and the U.S. Congress evaluate the possibility of new weapons inspections in Iraq, the Secretary of Defense explains why Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein poses a threat to the U.S. and the world.

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JIM LEHRER: And to the Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld. Mr. Secretary, welcome.

DONALD RUMSFELD: Thank you.

JIM LEHRER: Forty-eight hours later how does Iraq's offer to let inspectors back in look to you?

Iraq's letter to the U.N.



DONALD RUMSFELD: Well, it looks a lot like earlier ploys and moves that Iraq has taken. It's very clear that even within the letter it has contradictions. It in one place it talks about without any constraints or conditions, and then later in the letter it talks about beginning negotiations and discussions about how it would be done.

Second, it's interesting that here is a letter that purports to say that -- fair enough -- we're willing to work with the U.N. and allow inspectors in and within the last 48 hours they have fired on American aircraft six times in Northern and Southern Iraq.

JIM LEHRER: This was in the no-fly zones.

DONALD RUMSFELD: In the no-fly zones that the coalition forces, the United States and Great Britain, and men and women in uniform from our two countries have been flying over those zones implementing the U.N. resolutions. And they fired from the ground artillery and rockets at these aircraft six times since that letter was delivered. If that isn't a signal as to what they have in mind, I don't know what it is.

JIM LEHRER: So this letter should be ignored by the United States and the U.N.?

DONALD RUMSFELD: Oh, it's a letter not to the United States; it's a letter to the United Nations. And that's for the President and Secretary Powell to work with. I'm



We're trying to connect the dots -- not only before there's another September 11 on our country -- but before there's a September 11 that involves weapons of mass destruction, a biological or chemical or nuclear weapon. That is a serious responsibility that the government has... But if we wait until after it has happened, we're not talking about 3,000 people being killed as happened on September 11, you're talking about potentially tens of thousands of people being killed.

DONALD RUMSFELD, U.S. Secretary of Defense

Mr. Cheney's speech on Iraq

just really repeating what Secretary Powell has said with respect to the letter. It's pretty clear that it is not what it seems to be.

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JIM LEHRER: But in terms of inspections, you said -- you told the Congress today that this isn't about inspections. This is about disarmament. Are inspections not a step toward disarmament?

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DONALD RUMSFELD: Well, that was what was hoped years ago after the Gulf War. The hope was that Iraq would become a country that would disarm as they signed and agreed to do at the end of war. The U.N. resolutions said that the way to implement that disarmament was to have inspectors in, and clearly that's one way to do it.

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Inspectors have the benefit of working pretty well if they are working with a country that wants to disarm and has agreed to disarm. And then they invite inspectors in so that the world can know that they, in fact, did do it. It only works if you have a cooperative partner. You can't go in and inspect a country that is resisting those inspections and expect to find very much because so much of it's mobile, so much of it's underground.

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So there clearly is a role in our world for inspections but it tends to be with a cooperate partner, and we have seen the situation with Iraq where they have violated some 16 U.N. resolutions and finally threw the inspectors out.

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JIM LEHRER: Do you see, based on everything that you know, do you see any scenario that could disarm Iraq the way the United States wants it to be disarmed short of military action?

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DONALD RUMSFELD: Well, I don't think it's the United States that wants Iraq to be disarmed; it was the world community. The international --

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JIM LEHRER: Okay. Put world community in there then.

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DONALD RUMSFELD: The United Nations voted repeatedly --

JIM LEHRER: Sure.

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DONALD RUMSFELD: -- over and over and over -- that is what -- Iraq agreed to do that.



JIM LEHRER: Okay. But I mean now -- that was years ago now. We're in this

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situation now and the president of the United States says no more; action has to be taken; this has to end. Do you see a scenario short of military action that is going to get where the president and the world community wants to get, which is a disarmed Iraq?

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Disarmament through diplomacy?

DONALD RUMSFELD: Well, one would certainly hope so. That is to say that no one any sense would want to go to war. War is a last resort, not a first resort.

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We have gone through eleven years of violating these U.N. resolutions. We have gone through eleven years where -- recent years, four years where they threw the inspectors out and there's been no one there. And their progress on weapons of mass destruction -- chemical, biological, and nuclear -- have gone forward.



Now, if Saddam Hussein and his family decided that the game was up and we'll go live in some foreign country like other leaders have done -- I mean, clearly the shah of Iran left, Idi Amin left; "Baby Doc" Duvalier left. There have been any number of leaders who have departed recognizing that the game was up, that it was over, that they had run their term. So that could happen.

It's entirely possible that the people in that country, a lot of wonderful people who are hostages, they are hostages to a very vicious regime. They could decide the time was up and change the regime from inside. It's a very repressive regime. It would be a very difficult thing to do. But clearly the overwhelming majority of the people even the army don't want Saddam Hussein there. Look what he has done to that country. He is a pariah; he's threatening his neighbors. He's listed on the terrorist state. Their economy should be a booming economy with those oil revenues. Those people would want to be liberated.

JIM LEHRER: As Secretary of Defense, let's say all those possibilities do not pan out and let's say some kind of military action is required down the road, whenever. As Secretary of Defense, what would you say to the young men and women of America and their families as to why this is in the vital interests of this country to the point that they have to risk their lives for it?



DONALD RUMSFELD: Well, you know, it's interesting in your opening remarks you were talking about the congressional hearings on September 11 and the fact that they've spent months poring over all kinds of documentation and trying to connect the dots; what happened, what did people know and how might they have figured it out so that we could have prevented 3,000 innocent, men, women and children from being killed on September 11 of last year. What we're trying to do -- that's difficult. And they are having a dickens of a time trying to figure out that.

We're trying to connect the dots before there is another September 11th. We're trying to connect the dots not only before there's another September 11 on our country but before there's a September 11 that involves weapons of mass destruction, a biological or chemical or nuclear weapon. That is a serious responsibility that the government has.

...eleven years of violating these UN resolutions...[in] recent years, four years where they threw the inspectors out. And their progress on weapons of mass destruction -- chemical, biological, and nuclear -- has gone forward. .

DONALD RUMSFELD,
U.S. Secretary
of Defense

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It is not an easy thing to do. It is a difficult thing to do. Indeed it's more difficult than trying to connect the dots after it has happened. But if we wait until after it has happened, we're not talking about 3,000 people being killed as happened on September 11, you're talking about potentially tens of thousands of people being killed.

JIM LEHRER: But what do you ---

DONALD RUMSFELD: And you say that ---

JIM LEHRER: Okay.



DONALD RUMSFELD: You say that to the American people. The first responsibility of government is to provide for the common defense. That is what our central government is there for very essentially. That's its principle task. And as one looks at the world and

sees this new security environment and sees the nexus between weapons of mass destruction, terrorist states and terrorist networks and reflects on last September 11, reflects on our vulnerability as free people and how many people can come into our country and do things in our country and how available today biological weapons and chemical weapons and indeed elements of nuclear weapons are today, what one would say is that if we want to live in a more peaceful world, if we want to avoid that kind of a catastrophe, our country has to recognize that new security and recognize that absorbing that blow, waiting for it and absorbing it and then having the investigation afterward is not a preferred option.

The possibility of sending U.S. military to Iraq

JIM LEHRER: What would you say to an American people or to the member of the family of someone in the military who says fine, I hear you Mr. Secretary, how do you know that Saddam Hussein and the people of Iraq would use these weapons against the United States in a way that jeopardizes my life or my family's lives?



DONALD RUMSFELD: Well, first of all, the truth has a wonderful virtue; one can't know what can happen in the future. What you can do is try to connect the dots. You have a vicious dictator who has already weaponized chemical and biological weapons and already used them on their neighbors and on their own people. They have killed thousands of their own people with chemical weapons and they have used them against the Iranians. So we know we have a leader who a dictator, who's got the programs, who has a perfect willingness to use them.

And then one looks at their rhetoric. What are they saying about their neighbors; what are they saying about the United States, why are they offering \$20,000 bonuses to the families of suicide bombers who blow up people in other countries in shopping

You can't go in and inspect a country that is resisting those inspections and expect to find very much -- because so much of it mobile, so much of it's underground. So, there clearly is a role in our world for inspections but it tends to be with a cooperate partner, and we have seen the situation with Iraq where they have violated some 16 UN resolutions and finally threw the inspectors out.

DONALD RUMSFELD,
U.S. Secretary
of Defense

malls and discotheques and pizza parlors? Why do they do those things? Well, what kind of a threat does that pose?

If you were talking about a conventional capability your standard of evidence would be one thing. You say well, we can absorb that. If you're talking about an unconventional capability, one has to be very careful about saying you're going to absorb it.

JIM LEHRER: But then somebody could come back to you and say, well, now, wait a minute, we had a deterrent thing with the Soviet Union for many, many years and we had the capability of blowing them to smithereens and they were doing the same to us, a lot more so than with Saddam Hussein and Iraq, and it worked. We never took a preemptive strike against the Soviet Union.

DONALD RUMSFELD: Right. And that balance of terror or mutual assured destruction did, in fact work with the Soviet Union for a variety of different reasons. It did not work for everything. It did not stop the Soviet Union from invading other countries like Afghanistan.

If we had a balance of terror, if you will, with Saddam Hussein, which is not our first choice, our first choice is to prevent that, but if you had one, it wouldn't stop you, from them invading Kuwait again or invading Saudi Arabia, which they were ready to do, or getting in another war with Iran or attacking their other neighbors -- destroying Israel, as they talk about every day in their rhetoric. It wouldn't stop them from that.

Furthermore, the balance of mutual assured destruction with the Soviet Union didn't stop the Korean War; it didn't stop the Vietnam War. It didn't stop a whole host of other things in the world. It was a limited deterrent effect; it was a limited constraint or containment policy, but it was never perfect.



Furthermore, the nexus between terrorist networks and a terrorist state with weapons of mass destruction, it's perfectly possible for Saddam Hussein to work with a terrorist network, arrange for them to have a biological weapon, they have sleeper cells around the world, and to use them without a return address.

Suicide bombers are not deterred, they are proud, they think they're going to heaven. So the deterrent argument -- it would be wonderful if there were something like that that worked. But it is so obviously fallacious.

JIM LEHRER: No way to deter Saddam Hussein from using what he may or may not have or may try to do--

DONALD RUMSFELD: Well, you know, one the concerns about a conflict with Saddam Hussein is that he would use those weapons. The problem is he can't do it himself. He needs others to do it and I

would think that the Iraqi military and the linkages he has to those weapons ought to be very, very careful about thinking about using them. The concern of the United States is those weapons. The concern of the United States is that regime at the top. And clearly, people who would use those weapons are not going to have a happy future if in fact they do them.

JIM LEHRER: A man asked me today. I was on an airplane coming back from Colorado, and a man said to me, well, wait a minute, we know about the al-Qaida terrorists, they have already killed Americans, why don't we get rid of them first and then worry about a guy who might do something, a Saddam Hussein? What would you say to him?

DONALD RUMSFELD: Well, the global war on terrorism is important and that is a part of it. It is the nexus between an al-Qaida type network or another terrorist network and a terrorist state like Saddam Hussein that has those weapons of mass destruction. As we sit here there are senior al-Qaida in Iraq. They are there. They are also in Iran, they are also in other countries, they are in Pakistan. But --

JIM LEHRER: You couldn't separate them out is what you're saying, right?

DONALD RUMSFELD: Not from the air.

JIM LEHRER: Well, but what I mean is, going after Saddam Hussein is also going after al-Qaida in a way?

DONALD RUMSFELD: It is clearly -- if one deals with that problem in what ever way the President may decide -- and he has not made a decision, except to say that the one choice we don't have is to do nothing because time is on their side. With the Soviet Union time was on our side going back to that deterrent analogy. We can wait. Their economy was getting weaker and weaker and weaker and they were isolated. And finally it imploded.

Time is not on our side here. He's got the oil revenues; he's buying additional weapons; he's moving his weapons of mass destruction programs forward. He is dealing with terrorists and every week, month, and year that go on he is going to be more of a threat, not less of a threat.

JIM LEHRER: Speaking of time, there have been several stories in the last few days in the newspapers that you and your colleagues in the military are concerned about military action against Iraq because of the weather. It has to be before January or February because things start to get too hot after that. Is that legit? Is that a problem?

DONALD RUMSFELD: I don't know if I want to get into that. Obviously there are lots of things that are favorable -- more favorable at one moment than another moment. There are so many considerations that go into it. Certainly weather is one of them. But I don't know that I'd want to differentiate among them particularly.

JIM LEHRER: In terms of what is going on at the U.N. now, would you concede that at least what that letter did, we'll go back to where we started, the letter from Iraq, has slowed a process or the process down? Does the inspector thing now have to be played out some way?

DONALD RUMSFELD: I don't know if it will prove to have slowed things down. I was with the President and Secretary Powell this morning when Colin [Powell] briefed the National Security Council on what is it taking place in the United Nations, and I didn't get the sense that either one of them were in a relaxed mode. They clearly are going to be moving forward with short timetables in the United Nations.

JIM LEHRER: What about the diplomatic thing here? I mean, do we, meaning the big "we" the western world or the world that is upset about all of this, not just the United States, have to call Iraq's bluff? If you think this is not real and other people think this isn't real, does the bluff have to be called, and does that take time? Has that slowed things down; is that a legitimate course to take?



An international decision

DONALD RUMSFELD: Well, it depends on what credence one gives the moves that Iraq makes. I mean, here's a country that has violated every U.N. resolution that relates to it. It has lied; it has thrown the inspectors out. The idea that they are likely to be credible with respect to one more opportunity is, I think, debatable. And I think the problem the U.N. has is they have issued very tough resolutions year, after year after year, and they have never been implemented.

Now, at some point an institution has to ask how does it feel about that -- does it want to be irrelevant as an institution; does it want relevance or is it willing to simply keep making resolutions and having a dictator like Iraq tell the world community not to worry you're irrelevant? I think the U.N. is facing an issue here and I think the president put it very, very well before that institution: It is not a U.S. issue for the U.N.; it's a U.N. resolutions, a U.N. issue.

JIM LEHRER: But you don't think the offer of Iraq to readmit the inspectors kind of takes a little steam out of all of that? The French, several Arab nations, the Russians have already said we don't think we need to do anything right now, no new resolutions; let's play this thing out with the inspectors, that's not a problem?



DONALD RUMSFELD: I don't doubt for a minute that Iraq and maybe some other countries would like to rope a dope it along and just keep delaying things and putting it off. That's always the case.

Time is not on our side [with Iraq]. He has got the oil revenues; he's buying additional weapons; he's moving his weapons of mass destruction programs forward. He is dealing with terrorists and every week, month, and year that go on he is going to be more of a threat, not less of a threat.

DONALD RUMSFELD,
U.S. Secretary
of Defense

There's never unanimity on anything that I've seen, at least rarely-- but I think most countries are pretty wise and perceptive.

And the truth is that Saddam Hussein has been about four times as clever as the United States, the U.N., and the western world in managing public opinion. They have been -- they are just masters at manipulating the press and putting out disinformation. They are already moving military units and elements next to mosques and next to hospitals and next to schools.

JIM LEHRER: In anticipation of an attack?



DONALD RUMSFELD: Exactly. So they can claim the West -- the coalition has done all these terrible things. It's an old pattern. I don't know what credence it will be given up in the U.N.; only time will tell. I know that Colin

[Powell] is working with the other countries and a lot of them have been very forthright and understand what is taking place.

JIM LEHRER: Meanwhile and finally to your responsibilities as Secretary of Defense, whenever a decision is made, whatever the decision is made by the president to do something, is the United States military ready to do anything on that scale of everything that has been discussed?

DONALD RUMSFELD: Absolutely.

JIM LEHRER: Without question?

DONALD RUMSFELD: Without question.

JIM LEHRER: We can do that and still keep going after al-Qaida and do all of our other responsibilities?

DONALD RUMSFELD: Absolutely. The military leaders and the combatant commanders and the services and I have all met repeatedly; we have a force sizing construct and a strategy that enables the United States of America to engage in two major theater conflicts near simultaneously to win decisively in one and to occupy the country to swiftly defeat in the other case and hold; and to simultaneously provide for homeland defense and a series of lesser contingencies such as Bosnia or Kosovo.

And we have the capability to continue to pursue the global war on terrorism and certainly the problems of Iraq are part of the global war on terrorism as we have been doing.

JIM LEHRER: So, whatever the President decides, if it's a military decision on Iraq, you're prepared to do it and do it -- whatever it is?

DONALD RUMSFELD: There's just no question about it. The United States military will be prepared to do whatever the President orders and do it well.

JIM LEHRER: Mr. Secretary, thank you.

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