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Donald Rumsfeld

Pentagon Press Briefing on 9/11 Casualty Count Estimates, Emergency Responder Activity, and Classified Information Leaks

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Good afternoon.

I have taped a message to the people in the Defense Establishment across the world which I understand is going to be available shortly.

I -- I'm in route over to a -- another meeting at the White House in the next few minutes, so I just thought I'd stop down and make two or three points.

First, we currently believe and are certainly hopeful that the number of casualties being reported in the press is high. As you know from your own observation out there, the work is still going forward and we won't know for some time precise numbers. But from everything that we currently know, the -- the estimate that's been widely reported is considerably high, and we certainly pray that that's the case.



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Second, I do want to again express our sympathy to the families and friends and colleagues of all those who have been harmed by this attack on our country. Also we're, needless to say, deeply grateful to the many units from all over this area that are out there and have been out there for more than 24 hours -- firemen and ambulances and different teams and squads of individuals who are doing a very professional job for our country. We are, in a sense, seeing the definition of a -- of a new battlefield in the world, a 20th -- 21st-century battlefield. And it is a different kind of conflict. It is something that is not unique to this century, to be sure, but it is, given our geography and given our circumstance, it is in a -- in a major sense new for this country.

Finally, I'd like to say a word or two to the men and women in the Defense Establishment, most of whom deal with classified information. Since the end of the Cold War there has been a relaxation of tension, and the -- it's...had a lot of effects. It's led to proliferation. It's led to the...movement towards asymmetrical threats, as opposed to more conventional threats.

One of the other effects has been -- it...has had an effect on how people handle classified information. And it -- it seems to me it's important to -- to underline that when people deal with intelligence information and make it available to people who are not cleared for that classified information, the effect is to reduce the chances that the United States government has to track down and deal with the people who have perpetrated the attacks on the United States and killed so many Americans.

Second, when classified information dealing with operations is provided to people who are not cleared for that classified information, the inevitable effect is that the lives of men and women in uniform are put at risk, because they are the ones who will be carrying out those prospective operations.

And I -- This is a message really for all the men and women in the United States government who have access to classified information. It seems to me that when they see or learn of someone who is handling classified information in a way that is going to put the lives of the men and women in uniform at risk, they ought to register exactly what kind of a person that is: It's a person who's willing to violate federal criminal statutes, and willing to frustrate our efforts to track down and deal with terrorists, and willing to reveal information that could cost the lives of men and women in uniform.

I think it's time for all who deal with that information to treat it with the care and respect that it merits. I'd be happy to respond to a few questions.



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Q: Mr. Secretary, the casualty figure you -- you refer to, I assume, is the 800 number that was provided by the Arlington County Fire Department?

Secretary Rumsfeld: It is.

Q: And you say it's considerably high. We've heard from the military --

Secretary Rumsfeld: I said I -- I hope and pray that it is.

Q: -- the military services -- information from the military services indicates that it may be more in the neighborhood of 100 to 150. Is that closer to reality? Or can you give some better guidance --

Secretary Rumsfeld: We just won't know until we finish the work. The problem with trying to do roster checks with units, it may not include people that were connected with the heliport. It may not include the people -- contractor people. It may not include watch -- watchmen. It may not include work people who were working in the area. So -- So it...is folly to try to pretend that there's a number before there's a number. There is not a number, nor have we pinned down precisely how many people were in the aircraft who would also be in that --

Q: Mr. Secretary, there are some in the Middle East who are saying that the United States does not have the belly to do the kind of response to this attack on the United States, that this Administration, [the] previous Administration don't have it to go after them in the kind of way that they have to be gone after. Without any specifics whatsoever, help us with the attitude that you go into this process with.

Secretary Rumsfeld: Well, I guess time will tell. I -- I guess I'm kind of old-fashioned -- I'm inclined to think that if you're going to cock it, you throw it, and you don't talk about it a lot. So my instinct is that what you -- you do, is you go about your business and do what you think you have to do. I think anyone who thinks it's easy is wrong. I think that it -- it will require a sustained and broadly based effort. And I don't think that people ought to judge outcomes until sufficient time has passed to address what is clearly a very serious problem for the world. And it's not restricted to a single entity -- state or non-state entity. It is -- It is an attack on a way of life.



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The purpose of terrorism is to terrorize. It is to alter behavior. It is to force people who believe in freedom to be less free by altering their behavior and -- and redressing a balance between freedom and security. Anyone who's ever been in a war zone, as I know most of you have, you know that when you walk out of a building you don't walk out with your head high whistling. You -- You look around the corner and see what's out there. And that's not the way Americans live, and it's not the way we want to live.

Q: Mr. Secretary...we're getting word from reporters at the White House, quoting Ari Fleischer, that the target of the 757 was actually the White House, and also Air Force One was targeted.

Q: Can you shed any --

Secretary Rumsfeld: I'll leave that to the White House. I'll -- I'll leave that to the White House.

Q: Mr. Secretary, your comments on the handling of classified information, does that -- are you suggesting that it's time to move to a more secretive government in which there's less transparency about what it is you're doing? And how does that square with the goal of -- of openness that reassures both our friends and foes around the world that the United States' intentions are good? We all know that there is a wealth of material that's classified unnecessarily and doesn't necessarily need to be.

Secretary Rumsfeld: Well, I -- as...I'm sure you've discovered, I do believe in openness. And I think it's enormously important in a free system with a free press and -- and a -- a democratic underpinning to our wonderful success as a country that we -- we recognize that and respect it. I also know that you're quite right: There are things that get classified that ought not to be classified. But what I said is enormously important. And that is that when classified information is compromised by people who ought to know better, because they're unprofessional or uncaring and perfectly willing to violate federal criminal law and seemingly willing to put people's lives at risk, their colleagues and their neighbors and their friends, I think it's something that should stop.

Q:Was....sloppy handling of classified information -- Did that play some role in the attacks?



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Secretary Rumsfeld: Not to my knowledge. It is...an issue that I think, however, needs to be elevated and looked at and -- and that people in all aspects of government --

Q: What's the catalyst? Why are you embracing that today?

Q: Has it happened in the aftermath?

Secretary Rumsfeld: It...has been happening daily.