

SECRETARY RUMSFELD IS INTERVIEWED ON TV CARACOL IN BOGOTA, COLUMBIA, AS RELEASED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

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SPEAKERS: SECRETARY DONALD H. RUMSFELD, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

QUESTION: It is an honor for us to have you on TV Caracol and that you have accepted an interview. What is your perception of Colombia now that you have visited?

RUMSFELD: Well, it's a beautiful country. I have been here before over the years. When I was in business, I would come down here on occasion. And as we flew in today, the sun was out, the sky was beautiful, the clouds were lovely and the countryside was spread out before us. And one can't help but admire the progress that is being made against the terrorists and I think that is an encouraging thing. So it's a country that deserves to be free of terror.

QUESTION: Talking about terrorism, how does the United States see the peace process with the paramilitaries now approved to be called terrorists?

RUMSFELD: Well, those are things that of course are being worked on by the Colombian government and by others, and to the extent that the United States is involved it is through the Department of State. And I think in life it is not surprising that these things end up having both a military solution as well as a political solution. And how those balance out in any given situation is not knowable. But what is clear, it seems to me, is that the determination of the president of Colombia and his team is changing the facts on the ground. Progress is being made against the terror. And that's a good thing regardless of whether the final outcome is a military outcome or a political one.

QUESTION: Carlos Castano, the chief of the paramilitaries, has said that extradition is the main obstacle to the peace process in Colombia. What will happen to your extradition request for Castano?

RUMSFELD: I just don't know. That is a matter that people other than the Department of Defense of the United States are involved in, and I will leave it to experts.

QUESTION: Do you have a message for the paramilitaries and for the FARC?

RUMSFELD: Well, I do have a message for the FARC. They are holding three Americans, three individuals who were here in the country doing work that was beneficial to the Colombian people. They have many other hostages as well, and they should release them.

QUESTION: Is the United States considering rescue operations?

RUMSFELD: We certainly wouldn't announce it if we were. But it seems to me that the taking of hostages says an awful lot about an organization and the people in that organization. It is something that happens in the world; we are all adults and we know that this happens from time to time. And we also know the kind of people that do it.

QUESTION: You are an expert on military operations. Do you think it is possible to defeat terrorism here in Colombia in 18 months, as the minister of defense in Colombia said yesterday?

RUMSFELD: Well, look, the experts on that subject are here in Colombia, not in the United States. It is not for me to put a timetable down. But in terms of your question, do I believe that the Colombian people and government can be successful over some period of time in defeating terrorism? Absolutely. There is no doubt in my mind that the desire on the part of the people to be free and to not live in fear, the desire on the part of the people to not have to get up in the morning and wonder whether they are going to be taken hostage or killed, that is a strong desire and it's a compelling one.

And with the right leadership and the right kind of assistance and cooperation from other countries, neighboring countries in this case, I have every conviction that it is possible to be successful here. And I have great respect for the progress that has already been made. I have been secretary of defense now and watching this quite carefully for more than two and a half years. And I can see measurable progress.

QUESTION: Colombia is one of the main recipients of U.S. aid in the world. How long will that aid continue?

RUMSFELD: Those kinds of decisions of course are made by the president and the Congress, and one of the most important things they look for when they are making those judgments is not is it something that we can do by ourselves -- because there is very little other countries can do for Colombia -- but it is whether or not there is an institutional capability, a desire, and a plan and a vision, in that country on the part of the leadership, on the part of the people. If that is there, other people can be helpful; there they can be supportive, and they can cooperate. And it can make a difference. So we are delighted to be in partnership with the people of Colombia, and as long as we see that desire and that conviction and that steady progress, I think that the United States will be there.

QUESTION: Are there any plans to expand the help?

RUMSFELD: Well, of course as things change on the ground, the circumstances change and what is helpful changes. I am sure there will continue to be adjustments, just as there have been in the past. The program today of assistance and cooperation is different than it was a year ago or two years ago and I suspect it will be different in a year.

General Hill, who has been here meeting with the Colombian military, and General Myers was here recently, the chairman of our Joint Chiefs of Staff. We'll be having meetings back in the United States, discussing the plan that the Government of Colombia has put forward. We think it's a good plan. We think it's a plan that promises success. And we will be asking ourselves and asking the Colombian military how ought we to be adjusting the way we are assisting in the period ahead, and to the extent there are adjustments to be made (inaudible).

QUESTION: Will the issue of the International Criminal Court continue to be critical in order to continue support to Colombia?

RUMSFELD: It does. It is an issue that the members of our Congress, the House and Senate feel strongly about. It is an issue that the president, the vice president, the secretary of state and I feel quite strongly about.

We as a country at any given time are assisting a variety of countries around the world. And we have peacekeepers in Bosnia. In Kosovo, we have people in the international coalition in Afghanistan and Iraq. We have some folks on the ground right now in Liberia helping the ECOWAS, the eastern African countries and the United Nations to create a more stable situation there.

So more than any country on earth, our people are vulnerable to politicized prosecution. And we believe in our sovereignty just as we believe in Colombia's sovereignty.

One of the things that Colombia is fighting for against the narcotraffickers and the hostage-takers and the terrorists is for sovereignty over their country. We feel the same way about ours, and we do not believe that a court that we did not sign up with ought to have jurisdiction over Americans.

And we know that we are a target because we are in so many places in the world and that at the present time there have been charges brought against former President Bush, against this President Bush, against Vice President Cheney, against Colin Powell, against six, eight, 10 or 12 of our people, with alleged war crimes -- which are utter nonsense; they are just plain politics.

And it costs money, it takes time, it means you can't go places because of the politization of the justice process. So we believe that the Treaty of Rome provided for Article 98 provisions to be signed between countries because of that very fact, because they understood that they were trying to assert sovereignty over countries that had not signed up for the treaty. So it is a perfectly understandable thing, which is why the United States has now signed 59, I believe, of these so-called Article 98 agreements, with respect to the International Criminal Court. It is an important matter.

QUESTION: General Myers came here last week and he compared Venezuela with Syria. Is the United States considering a different approach with the Chavez regime?

RUMSFELD: I leave that to the Department of State. That's diplomacy, and I am with the Defense Department.

QUESTION: Sometimes analysts think that the U.S. support for our country is based on too many conditions. In our bilateral relationship, how much weight does your interest carry and how much does our mutual concerns?

RUMSFELD: You are talking about constraints imposed by the Congress of the United States. There are a lot of constraints, and we very recently went to the Congress and asked them to loosen the constraints because we felt they were too inhibiting. And indeed they were, and they were loosened to some extent. They have not been loosened to the extent that I would like.

But as I look at the situation here, it seems to me that the people engaged in narcotrafficking are also people that are engaged in hostage taking, and they are also people that are engaged in terrorist acts against the government and the people of Colombia. To the extent the United States puts a restriction on some category of assistance and says it can only be used for one of those three problem areas -- either the narcotrafficking or the hostage taking or terrorism -- but not the other two, it is almost impossible to implement that, it seems to me.

So I think the analysts you are quoting are correct and it is something that we in the United States have to address and discuss with our Congress and see if we can't continue to find ways to see how our assistance can be most effective.

QUESTION: Has the U.S. recommended the expulsion or retirement of any Colombian military or police officials?

RUMSFELD: Not that know of. But I wouldn't know.

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