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Updated: 26 Feb 2003



United States Department of Defense

News Transcript

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Wednesday, February 26, 2003 - 2:03 p.m. EST

Briefing on Human Shields in Iraq

(Briefing on Human Shields in Iraq. Slides shown during this briefing are on the Web at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Feb2003/g030226-D-9085M.html>)

Staff: Well, thanks for all -- thank you all for coming this afternoon.

It was just last week, I think the 19th, that the secretary stated that he hoped to bring you a more detailed briefing on the subject of human shields at a later date. Well, today is that later date, and today we have with us someone that you'll be able to refer to as "a senior Defense official" -- I'm not sure why it says it just like this -- but "a senior defense official" that will talk to you today.

As you know, Saddam has a long pattern of holding noncombatants, and our subject matter expert today is prepared to discuss that with you in some detail. We'll go for about 30 minutes or until you run out of questions.

Sir?

Sr. Defense Official: Thank you. Thank you. Good afternoon.

I'm going to touch on several dimensions of the issue of human shields, and we've got some materials to hand out to you at the end of the briefing that will expand on some areas that I won't go into great detail on. But I will refer to those in the course of the briefing.

This is a very brief presentation on a rather complicated aspect of Iraq's use of human shields and what we call deceptive sanctuaries. We describe these activities as countertargeting. It's kind of a unique, catchy phrase. And these -- countertargeting describes the techniques which can be used against military operations, overhead reconnaissance or even U.N. inspectors.

As you recall, the Serbs carried out this kind of countertargeting measures against NATO air power and reconnaissance during Operation Allied Force. These included dispersing military equipment and units to civilian facilities -- excuse me -- extensive use of underground facilities, creating false bomb damage, and disseminating false or misleading reports and propaganda about the true extent of civilian casualties and damage to civilian structures.

Iraq's countertargeting activities have several objectives. These objectives are directly related to the strategy that Iraq is employing against the current inspection regime. First and foremost, it aims at preserving Iraq's military capabilities. To achieve this, it seeks to exploit and complicate coalition military planning by placing Iraqi military forces in so-called no-strike areas, that is areas that the coalition would probably avoid targeting with military force, even if lawful military targets are located there, because of their proximity to civilian neighborhoods, humanitarian facilities or cultural and religious sites.

Second, it aims at creating a strategic incident, if one of these facilities is damaged or destroyed, or civilian casualties occur, in order to at least discredit a coalition military campaign, and at best, if possible, as occurred during Desert Storm, bring it to a temporary halt.

So, to achieve these objectives, you'll see Iraq employs both human shields and deceptive sanctuaries.

Next slide, please. Oh, you're one step -- you're one slide ahead of me. Back, back. There we go.

These are the subject areas we're going to walk through today.

Now we can move on, please. Next slide.

I use this term "counter-targeting." Forgive me, it's kind of an arcane term used here in the Pentagon a lot. This is what we mean by it -- it's a mouthful -- preventing or degrading detection, characterization, destruction, and post-strike assessment of any targets by any means.

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There's no formal definition of "human shields" out there. This is one we kind of created for the purposes of the presentation today. And also, there's no formal term for "deceptive sanctuaries." But I think as you look through these definitions, you'll see they kind of pertain quite accurately.

I should emphasize that the use of human shields is in fact a violation of the principle that civilians must be protected during wartime, and it's a most serious violation of the law of armed conflict.

You might ask how does Iraq know what constitutes a so-called no- strike area or target. The short answer is that the broad categories of civilian facilities that are normally avoided, unless explicitly used for military purposes, are rather common knowledge. They have been identified in unclassified coalition targeting doctrine and open- source publications, such as the famous Gulf War airpower study.

Next slide, please.

Why would Iraq employ these techniques? Some of it's obvious. Saddam and his military planners apparently believe that by employing human shields and deceptive sanctuaries they can achieve some or all of the following in the event of an actual conflict:

Number one, deter strikes against some fielded forces and key facilities;

Number two, degrade the effectiveness of coalition strikes -- and we'll go into a little more detail about this -- by complicating the actual targeting process when we're looking at a facility.

Number three, prevent the rapid efficient destruction of key regime facilities, capabilities, and field-deployed military forces, thereby slowing down an air campaign and stopping the coalition from achieving their aims quickly.

From the direct experience of Desert Storm and from observation of foreign reactions to the NATO air campaign in Operation Allied Force and Enduring Freedom, Saddam also believes that Iraq might be able to create a strategic incident in the event of an air strike against a prohibited area.

Next slide.

What's the basis of Saddam's understanding of the coalition military strategy and coalition targeting that led him to this belief and the use of counter-targeting techniques? Again, he learned from the past, particularly from the Desert Storm air campaign and from allied force in Enduring Freedom. In addition, the United States has made it clear in the official Defense Department report on Operation Desert Storm -- a portion is shown here on the slide -- that the U.S. and its coalition complies with the law of armed conflict and seeks to avoid human -- civilian facilities. Saddam regards these as excellent deceptive sanctuaries.

Next slide.

This is the report I'm referring to. It's the conduct of the Persian Gulf War that -- the formal report submitted to Congress. And this is lifted from the report, one of the -- I believe it's page 99. It's an excerpt. As you can see, it explicitly mentions mosques as examples of prohibited targets.

Okay, let's look at some historical examples as well as some current activities.

Next slide.

First, this is a famous 1991 photograph of two MiG-21s deliberately positioned next to the Ur Ziggurat, otherwise a tower, near Talil. As you can see, they were brought up this road and parked directly in front of this archeological site. Obviously there's no airfield or landing strip nearby for these aircraft. A coalition strike on the aircraft could well have caused extensive damage to this ancient Mesopotamian cultural treasure. It's over 4,000 years old.

Next slide.

This shows another famous Desert Storm example that might be familiar to many of you. Iraq took advantage of an airstrike near a mosque to create an incident designed to discredit the coalition air campaign and provided supposed proof of an Iraqi claim that the coalition was deliberately damaging Muslim religious sites. The Iraqis removed the dome of this mosque to simulate bomb damage and bulldozed some rubble to create the false impression that a coalition bomb had struck the mosque. If you look in the upper -- slightly right, that's the nearest actual bomb crater from the attacks that occurred near this facility, because there was a military unit close to this facility. The point of this disinformation effort was, again, to embarrass the coalition military and foment a storm of international protest.

Next slide.

Here's an example from 1999. We show you this picture to indicate that Iraqi countertargeting methods are not new or occasional measures. On the contrary, the Iraqis consistently use mosques for covert and other military purposes, and they've been doing it since Desert Storm. As you can see in this case, the Iraqi military deliberately parked military vans immediately adjacent to the outer wall of the facility. There are actually three vehicles here.

Next slide, please.

Another picture from 1999 shows military heavy equipment transporters, or HETs, parked adjacent to a mosque. HETs are to transport tanks and other military vehicles. Those of you who remember the famous

pictures of the Iraqis using HETs to move the nuclear calutrons from one of the facilities to avoid inspection in 1991 will recognize the HETs in this image.

Again, long cargo trucks, access road, and then the mosque.

Next slide, please.

More recently, from last year, Saddam has been removing ammunition supplies from existing depots and putting them in smaller bunkers right next to civilian neighborhoods. Here's a case from September of last year where they built field fortifications -- in this case, revetments and a bunker -- next to a school. The Iraqi intention here is clear: use the proximity of the school in an attempt to avoid attacks on the military equipment or unit dispersal area nearby, which are clearly valid military targets. Are we to assume that the Iraqis have evacuated the school? How can we be sure?

Next slide, please.

This is kind of an interesting example from October of last year. It's clear that the Iraqis built revetments for ammunition or military equipment next to one of Saddam's international food warehouses, a civilian facility that's used to distribute food provided from the international community for the Iraqi population. Again, the intention here is obvious: use the nearby civilian structure to shield a military unit or military equipment from coalition attack in case of a conflict.

Next slide, please.

The next slide demonstrates another method for shielding ammunition. This is a rather complex one. In this example, Saddam is trying to shield military ammunition by using a religious site. This mosque is situated right in the middle of a large ammunition depot. Again, you can see these are all revetments with bunker buildings in the middle of them for ammunition storage, and a mosque located in the middle of this field of ammunition bunkers.

Clearly, this is a rather unusual and dangerous location for a mosque. What would happen if the ammunition in one of the bunkers exploded because of a faulty safety procedure or a handling accident? You're all familiar with plenty of problems of this type both in the Soviet Union and the United States.

Now, I would point out that armies around the world, including our own, have regular military bases on which are located religious structures. But I personally know of no examples where one could find a religious structure right in the middle of an ammunition storage depot of this type.

Next slide.

In this case from October of last year, anti-aircraft weapons have been placed on the roof of the Ministry of Media. These weapons represent a military threat to our forces. But the building is reportedly the home of the Iraqi media. Perhaps many foreign journalists also frequent this site. How should a military planner respond to this kind of threat?

Next slide, please.

Okay, what are the implications of this kind of activity? Simply put, it's certainly a violation of the law of armed conflict and the principle of distinction, that is making a clear and precise distinction between combatant military forces and non-combatant civilian sites. It's an attempt to discredit U.S. and coalition reconnaissance and air campaigns. Saddam is preparing as well to capitalize on any opportunity to discredit and embarrass the coalition and foment an international uproar by creating what we would call a strategic incident. In this

undertaking, again he has learned from recent campaigns, and especially from an incident during Desert Storm.

Next slide.

This incident involved the famous Al-Firdos bunker or Al- Amiriya bunker that occurred during February 1991, at the height of the coalition air campaign in Desert Storm.

In this incident, a bunker in downtown Baghdad was being used by the Iraqi government as a key command-and-control node. As you can see from this picture, the "before" picture, on the left- hand side, the bunker was heavily camouflaged and, sure enough, located near a school and a mosque.

The lower section of this bunker housed the government command personnel, while the upper portion was apparently open for civilian use. When the bunker was destroyed, the Iraqis launched a media campaign emphasizing the civilian casualties. To this day, the Al Firdos bunker is still preserved as a shrine.

Next slide.

What followed this incident? A very intense campaign by Iraq to highlight the civilian losses, but no mention was ever made of the command function of this bunker.

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To sum up, we are now observing an activity that has been going on for over 10 years. The Iraqis have regularly placed air defense missile systems and associated equipment in and around civilian areas, including parks, mosques, hospitals, hotels, crowded shopping districts, and even in cemeteries. They have positioned rocket launchers next to soccer stadiums that are in active use, and they've parked operational surface-to-air missile systems in civilian industrial areas.

This is a well-organized, centrally managed effort, and its objectives are patently clear: preserve Iraq's military capabilities at any price, even though it means placing innocent civilians and Iraq's cultural and religious heritage at risk, all in violation of the fundamental principle that civilians and civilian objects must be protected in wartime.

Now as you all know, there has been plenty of reporting in the press on foreign volunteers as human shields going to Iraq. And what we're going to provide you with today -- I'll just hold up a couple articles I brought from The New York Times and The Washington Post -- is an assessment by the National Intelligence Council, which goes into some detail on, again, the history since Desert Storm of how Iraq has attempted to use foreign volunteers to protect legitimate military facilities. And I think you'll find this study quite interesting.

With that, we'll open it to questions. Yes, sir?

Q: Going to that, using foreign volunteers, why do you not consider those folks to be enemy combatants since they voluntarily place themselves there?

Sr. Defense Official: I'm not a legal expert, but you certainly could argue that since they're working in the service of the Iraqi government, they may, in fact, have crossed the line between combatant and noncombatant. But I can't pass judgment on that.

Yes, sir?

Q: Two questions. One, back in 1991, Saddam also took some civilians -- held them hostage for a while, but my memory's a little fuzzy. What happened in that case? Did he eventually let them go? And did -- is it your

assessment at all that he learned anything from that or may decide that this time, maybe the strategy of letting them go, which he did last time, was the way to go? Do you think --

Sr. Defense Official: Obviously, as I recall, what happened was he took a number of foreigners, including U.S. citizens who were in Iraq, as well as Kuwaitis and POWs -- and it's described in some detail in the NIC report -- and distributed them at facilities. They were -- the reporting was they were relatively well-treated; they were moved around a lot. When he decided that the international uproar and furor over it was more negative than the positive results of using the human shields, he let them go. So, I think he has a certain calculus that, you know, he will look at those options and decide at what point it would work.

Keep in mind that the 1991 incident -- most of them did not involve volunteers. These were people who were "guests" of the Iraqi government, was the way they described it -- pardon my sarcasm. But they were, in effect, prisoners. So that's slightly different than what we're seeing in terms of foreigners going to the country. That also happened in the mid-'90s, where we had, during the 1997 crisis, we did have people going to Iraq who were volunteering themselves as shields. So, I think he'll use a calculus to try and determine when is this working for me, when is it not?

Q: And just one sort of technical question. It's often stated that the use of human shields is in violation of the international law of armed conflict. When you say that, are you referring to a recognized body of law? Or, you know, where can we go look that up? Is it a series of --

Sr. Defense Official: Yeah. I'm going to refer you to the OSD general counsel, but my -- I know there are certain portions of the Geneva Convention that state that explicitly, that it is not permissible to use the civilians. I don't know if they -- I think they may even use the term "shield."

They don't say "human shield", but if you go to OSD general counsel, they have the citation from the appropriate conventions.

Yes, ma'am.

Q: It seems to me -- I want to go back to this point here. This is a really critical distinction. Are these people, once they volunteer, are they putting them -- taking themselves away from civilians and they're there now on the combatant side? This to me seems like the crux of the whole matter. And you're saying, "I don't know, I'm not a legal expert." Somebody must have figured this out at the Pentagon.

Sr. Defense Official: Again, yeah, I'm -- I'm an intelligence expert. It's not that I'm trying to dodge the question, but I think we would need OSD policy and legal affairs folks to answer your question.

Staff: Yeah, let me just keep it in context a little bit. What we're doing here today, and what our briefer is here to talk about, is what past Iraqi behavior has been with respect to this, and what future Iraqi behavior will probably be. It is not within his scope to be able to discuss with you what the U.S. policy, the U.S. military policy might be towards these actions that he's describing Iraq has taken in the past and will likely take in the future. So --

Q: Can you take the question --

Staff: So we'll -- we need to keep it within that scope.

What you're referring to is perhaps the other side of the coin here, which is a targeting issue, not a counter-targeting issue. And we hope in our series of briefings that we're bringing to you that we'll do something like that for you in the near future, which is the other side of the coin.

Q: And if you could just take this single question today and see if you can get us an answer --

Staff: Oh, he can certainly take the question.

Q: Okay. Thank you.

Sr. Defense Official: I'm looking -- just real quick, there is a reference to the convention in this pub we have. So you can see that right up front.

Yes. From this side.

Q: I just may cross that line, but the fact that you're here giving us this presentation, does that reflect that this is a concern on your part because these techniques can, indeed, be effective in deterring certain types of attack?

Sr. Defense Official: That's a(n) operational issue. My job from the intelligence is certainly to identify for the operational commanders and OSD policy that this is occurring. But it's their decision on how to handle this.

It is a particularly difficult intelligence issue. For example --

(To staff.) Can you scroll back to, I don't care, one of the pictures with the trucks near the facility?

When we first look at this, the question is, well, are these guys who have pulled over to do their morning prayer? Well, we have to look at a trend. And what we see is -- yeah, here's a good example with the house. Did these guys just pull over to do their morning prayer at the mosque? Well, there's a trend there. No. You know, it's the -- the trucks remain parked there. They've been there for a while. We see a lot of vehicular activity. So for us, we don't make the call of -- that you're getting at.

Q: But overall can you say, can you assess, perhaps, the extent to which you're seeing this happen now?

Sr. Defense Official: It's growing considerably. Again, it hasn't -- it never stopped since '91. And the Iraqis again are getting more sophisticated in -- .

Q: Your overall assessment sounds to me like Saddam Hussein is smart. He's putting things in places that cause you heartburn. And if I were trying to defend myself against a large military potential assault on my country, I would do exactly what he's doing. I would park everything at a mosque. I mean, you're -- it just seems like this is a basic survival technique. Are you indicating that it's terrible to do this?

Sr. Defense Official: From a personal viewpoint? It's --

Q: It's smart, from a military commander's viewpoint, to try to protect his military assets of an assault, isn't it?

Sr. Defense Official: Again, if you have no respect for the laws of armed conflict and the Geneva Convention, you could certainly argue that. I think it puts the onus on him in terms of what may occur as a result of collateral damage involving these military forces.

Q: You showed a picture of the Ministry of Media and of the anti-aircraft guns.

Sr. Defense Official: Yeah.

Q: Do you believe -- and that's, what, from October. Do you believe that now that Saddam Hussein is co-locating a large amount of weapons or banned material in places that journalists are working or living?

Sr. Defense Official: I don't know about journalists specifically. I mean, antiaircraft guns are not banned material, of course. They're legitimate --

Q: I understand. Separate from the picture you've shown --

Sr. Defense Official: Yeah. And we do know he's concentrating a lot of military forces in and around the Baghdad area with the deliberate intention of creating an urban combat environment that, again, in terms of collateral damage and civilian casualties is extremely complex. But when you put an antiaircraft on top of a facility, this is, you know, a difficult decision. Do you shoot at this facility if they're shooting at you? It does make this facility a legitimate military target.

Q: But specifically where foreign journalists are working and living, you're seeing that now?

Sr. Defense Official: Well, this is the one example that I'm aware of. I assume they go in this building, since this is the media building.

Q: But this is the same thing, just -- if it was the Ministry of Information, or is that a separate --

Sr. Defense Official: That's different. That's separate. This is the media building.

I'm sorry. Yes.

Q: Do you have any current estimate of how many human shields are deployed in Iraq?

Sr. Defense Official: Only what I've seen in the newspaper reporting. It ranges anywhere from 100 to 200 people. And if you look at some of the reporting, they've -- a lot of them have already expressed some discontent with the way they've been treated and the facilities they've been asked to, quote, "shield," unquote. They've -- some of them have refused to go to certain facilities.

Q: Any evidence that Iraqis are being compelled to do this yet? But these other ones you're talking about are all volunteer --

Sr. Defense Official: Right. They're -- yeah. He has put out calls for Iraqi volunteers, again, and that occurred -- that's occurred historically. He's done that a number of times.

Q: What is the response to that?

Sr. Defense Official: There's been a response, but it's very difficult to tell in that regime -- are these true volunteers or, you know, or are they compelled? A lot of them, as you'll see in the NIC report, were offered food and, you know, some money to stay at facilities. And given the situation, you know, that's pretty compelling.

Let's go in the back.

Q: Just a technical question. Can you explain, if not legally, just your assessment why an air defense battery on a civilian building would be a no-no? I mean, we've been known to do that, and that's a defensive weapon. And obviously it could be a target in the military campaign.

Sr. Defense Official: Yeah.

Q: I guess I'm unclear as to why that has a legal ramification?

Sr. Defense Official: This doesn't -- this actually doesn't have a legal problem, because it presents a clear military threat, and the convention -- again, I'm not a lawyer, so -- God, don't quote me in the paper; I'll be up before a judge tomorrow --

Q: (Off mike) -- defensive weapon.

Sr. Defense Official: -- but when you put a weapon on a building, that presents a legitimate -- but what it can do, again, is create the potential for a strategic incident, that -- here's a civilian building. There are foreigners inside. The building gets bombed because of the anti-aircraft threat. Foreign journalists get killed. You know, it can turn ugly quickly.

Yes, ma'am?

Q: Could you describe in a little more detail the 1991 incident? Did the United States know that that building had both civilians and military commanders in it? And what was the military response to that? Did it shut down bombing in Baghdad for a day or for an hour or --

Sr. Defense Official: Yeah. As I recall, you know, the United States knew that was being used as a command node in downtown Baghdad. There were some tip-offs to that. One of them was the camouflage pattern -- you know, the fact that they camouflaged the building. The -- after the story hit the papers, the coalition stopped bombing in downtown Baghdad -- I believe it was for four days or seven days.

Q: And did they know that when they initially targeted it that there were civilians inside on the second floor?

Sr. Defense Official: These were designated as civilian bomb shelters -- there were, like, 20-plus of these throughout Baghdad. So that possibility was there.

Yes, in the back?

Q: Yeah, you left now the impression that there is a lot of religious sites that the Iraqis used before. Are you of the same impression, or is it only by accident?

Sr. Defense Official: Oh, no, it's quite deliberate. You mean used mosques, et cetera?

Q: The ratio between the number of pictures that you have seen for mosques in your presentation is higher than houses or ministries or --

Sr. Defense Official: Yeah, yeah. I think the mosque is a favorite option that they like to use, and we've seen this over the past 10 years --

Q: Any explanation for this?

Sr. Defense Official: Well, they -- again, I think they like to -- they would like to create a strategic incident involving, you know, an Islamic holy site, and here you have a Western-type coalition bombing an Islamic holy site, in part, if that occurred. Plus, they realize we've stated in a number of publications that we consider these off-limits, and so they -- I think they believe possibly the degree of protections are higher.

Yes, in front?

Q: Some people might find it ironic that in a briefing where you're talking about things that Iraq is allegedly doing that are violations of the Geneva Convention, that it's done by a briefer who is to remain unnamed. Can you give us a sense of why it's important for us not to name you; why this briefing needs to be off the record?

Staff: On background.

Q: On background?

Sr. Defense Official: I'll hand that over to --

Staff: We, as you know, have done a series of briefings for you and are going to continue to do a series of briefings for you. And these are really technical briefings. And at the technical briefing level, we've decided that we would do these on background as a means of helping you understand some of what you might see in the future and to refresh you, particularly in this case, to some of the things that Saddam Hussein has done in the past, too. So, that's -- as we do this series of technical briefings over time, we are doing them on a background basis.

Q: Sir?

Sr. Defense Official: Yes?

Q: We've heard a number of times Saddam Hussein sleeps in a different place every night. Do you know whether he has bunkers or compounds or whatever, in civilian areas in order to protect himself, should U.S. forces come after him personally?

Sr. Defense Official: Absolutely. In fact, one of the rumors about the Al-Firdos bunker was he was there an hour before the bomb hit the bunker. He's got a very extensive network of bunkers. We know there are some bunkers in and near mosques. He's got, of course, his extensive palaces throughout Baghdad and throughout the country that he goes to and moves to, to find protection. So this is, you know, clearly part of a broader strategy, survival strategy.

Yes?

Q: Sir, you mentioned that you've seen this activity pick up, I guess even since these photos have been taken. Can you put a little bit more meat on that bone? Is it a matter of more anti-aircraft being moved towards either mosques or what not? Is it an issue of actual, you know, Republican Guard troops and tanks being moved to these positions, that kind of thing?

Sr. Defense Official: Yeah, all of the above. We've seen air defense forces, ground forces, communications nodes, et cetera, moved in or near what we would call, again, deceptive sanctuaries.

Yes, sir?

Q: In the case of the human shields, do you have any sense at this point of what types of places they'll be deployed to or, you know, what kinds of buildings, or whatever, they want to protect?

Sr. Defense Official: Yeah, we're getting -- trying to decipher some interesting information because the foreign -- you're talking about the foreign human shields coming into the country. They kind of requested specific types of locations -- electric power plants, hospitals, schools. The Iraqis have been pushing to have them located near some facilities that they're not that anxious to go to, which they think are -- some industrial facilities, which they think are military related. There was some disagreement over a water purification plant they didn't want to be located near. And also, in some locations they went to, they noticed there were Iraqi military units nearby. Even though they were being sent to what they considered a legitimate facility, such as an electric power plant, they noticed that there were large Iraqi military forces nearby and they objected to being placed there.

Q You noted that in 1991, Saddam briefly used hostages as human shields.

Sr. Defense Official: Yes.

Q: And this time we seem to primarily be talking about volunteers, whether they're coerced or not. How likely is it that Saddam would take hostages again as human shields, perhaps foreign journalists or others unwillingly. Have you made any assessment about whether that's a likely course of action?

Sr. Defense Official: Given -- and this is based solely on historical evidence -- given his past behavior, it wouldn't surprise me one bit if he certainly went after, for example, the inspectors; there's one possibility. I don't know how anxious he'd be to use foreign journalists. He's very sensitive to the effect of the media. And if he wants to create a strategic incident, I think he wants to be seen in as favorable a light as possible.

Yes, sir?

Q: Given your role in intel, have you seen -- there's also reports in the media about the U.S. launching a very large propaganda/psychological operations campaign to the Iraqis, saying, "Don't go near military sites, stay away from them." Have you seen any indications that that's actually taking place; that there are fewer civilians, say, going to certain mosques or whatever that may have visible military equipment or whatever near them?

Sr. Defense Official: I can't, quite honestly, can't answer that question at this point.

Yes, sir?

Q: In this room and also at the White House, we've had warnings given from the United States to Iraqi military that if you follow orders of Saddam's regime to deploy weapons of mass destruction, that you will be subject to a war crimes trial. Since what you're discussing today is violations of the Geneva Convention and other international law, are you at this point also saying that if people in Iraq follow Saddam's orders to use civilians, to use mosques, schools and other things, that that would be in violation of international law; they also are subjecting themselves to a potential for prosecution in war crimes trials after the war?

Sr. Defense Official: I can't answer that. I don't have the legal expertise. But certainly there is that implication here. And there's a historical trail here that points to clear humanitarian issues that would need to be addressed in a larger legal --

Q: Can you take -- I'm sorry, could you take the question?

Staff: I mean, again, that gets into a policy issue, and it's really beyond the scope of this briefing. So I can talk to you -- (off mike) -- afterwards and (we can talk about that ?).

Q: Well --

Sr. Defense Official: You've had a chance. We'll go up here, please. And we'll come back to you.

Q: You're not saying the U.S. forces will not hit military targets placed in a way you're describing, are you?

Sr. Defense Official: I can't speak to what our operational planning would be. I mean, the Al-Firdos example -- horrendous. You know, we voiced our regret about killing civilians. But again, it was a legitimate military target, and -- war is hell.

Follow-up? Yeah.

Q: Follow-up. So human shields placed in locations that you've mentioned, those people are --

Sr. Defense Official: They're at risk.

Q: Yeah.

Sr. Defense Official: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, one of the points, quite clearly, is -- and they're aware, that this is placing yourself at risk. And it's a very difficult issue.

Yes. In the back. And then we'll --

Q: Question about the military significance of a lot of these vehicles, air defense systems, peace parks you pointed out here. Have you seen evidence in the last couple months where Republican Guard units or Special Republican Guard units -- people or units that we want to hit are being hidden, versus these trucks here or there, or any aircraft guns that are in there?

Sr. Defense Official: I can say in general we've seen every level of Iraqi military forces use these techniques, including the Republican Guards.

Q: (Off mike) -- for the Republican and the Special Republican Guards, the guys who may fight, actually?

Sr. Defense Official: It'd be hard for me to put a number on it. But again, most of it has occurred in particular in the Baghdad area.

Yes, you've been patient.

Q: While we have you on background, and you talked about Saddam Hussein's complexes that potentially he hides in from time to time, can you talk on any level of the U.S. success, or lack of, in tracking Saddam Hussein's movements, and anything to dispel or possibly talk about these body doubles that he has in place to place?

Sr. Defense Official: You're outside my area of expertise. Interesting question.

Staff: We're starting to lose our crowd, so let's take two more and then call it a wrap here.

Sr. Defense Official: Yes?

Q: Can you -- I know you said you couldn't do numbers, but can you come up with a percentage of the targets that are -- potential targets that he has protected with human shields?

Sr. Defense Official: No, no, I couldn't do that.

Q: (Off mike.)

Sr. Defense Official: It would be really difficult because I, you know, am not exposed to the full target list. So -- okay, in the back. You, and that's it.

Q: A little bit off the track, but just to follow up from before this, the psychological operations that we've heard about, can you just say in general terms whether or not you have some assessment as to whether it's working? I know it's hard to quantify, but do you feel confident that you guys are getting this message out to the people that you're trying to --

Sr. Defense Official: I think it would be pretty difficult to assess that right now. And the best measure would be if and when the campaign occurs, you would see -- that's usually the problem with PSYOPS, is you don't see the full extent, as we did during Desert Storm where there were considerable defections, surrenders en masse of forces.

Staff: Last question.

Q: Yes, sir. What options do we have to minimize the loss of civilian life? Do we drop leaflets? I mean, what can we do to keep it at a minimum?

Sr. Defense Official: Again, an operational question. But everything assists here -- PSYOPS. We do have precision-targeting techniques. You saw the example of the domeless mosque. And certainly our ability to use precision targeting has helped with this particular issue to some degree.

Q: But in the Gulf War, were any efforts made to try to save civilian lives?

Sr. Defense Official: Oh, absolutely. We didn't attack those two -- well, not just civilian lives -- but we did not attack those two MiGs near the Ziggurat because we didn't want to damage the facility -- the site.

Staff: That's a good question to end on, because like I was saying, this is really about countertargeting, and I hope in the near- future to bring you more details on our efforts and what we do. As we have told you in the past, you can certainly be assured that we do everything humanly possible to scrutinize our targets to ensure that we minimize the effects on the Iraqi population, the Iraqi people.

I would encourage you as you leave to pick up one of these pamphlets that our senior Defense official talked about today.

I think the importance of this briefing really goes to letting you know that we all need to be prepared for Saddam's use of innocence and the way in which he shields his military machines. Putting civilians at risk is a violation of the law of armed conflict, and in most cases, is a war crime. And Saddam Hussein will bear full responsibility for the consequences of his actions.

So, thank you all for attending today.

Sr. Defense Official: Thank you.

Q: I picked up those pamphlets. Are those just recently published?

Sr. Defense Official: Yes.

Q: Is that online?

Staff: It is -- I don't know the answer to that question. Let me find out for you.

It's not online.

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