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United States Department of Defense.

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Thursday, June 5, 2003 - 10:00 a.m. EDT

### Background Briefing on IAEA Nuclear Safeguards and the Tuwaitha Facility

(Background briefing on the upcoming IAEA nuclear safeguards inspection and the Tuwaitha Nuclear Facility in Iraq.)

Staff: Just a reminder before I get started today that this is on background. We have two senior Defense officials and one senior military official. And I think most of you know at least the one who will be starting our briefing today. And the second one -- all right. These will be over on the side if you need them afterwards. And joining us from theater will be a senior defense official. And with that, I don't want to take up any more time. These will be available on the side. So, sir?

Senior Defense Official: Good morning, everyone. It's good to see that you survived last evening's affair and are here bright-eyed and ready to go to work. The purpose of this is to give you some background on the impending visit of an IAEA team into the facility at Tuwaitha. I have asked two individuals to give you some of the background information to help give you some idea of what we anticipate the team there is going to -- how they're going to be received, the support they're going to receive from us when they arrive, the mission that they are engaged in, and a little bit on what we anticipate they will encounter when they arrive on the scene. So I will ask first the people from our policy office to give you the background on the mission, and then the theater people will



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give you some background on the circumstances out there in the theater.

Senior Defense Official: Good morning.

Senior Defense Official: Yeah, there you are on background.

Senior Defense Official: There you go. (Laughter.)

Staff: You are a Senior Defense Official.

Senior Defense Official: Senior Defense Official. As you know, the United States government has invited the IAEA to conduct a Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty safeguards inspection at the Baghdad yellow-cake storage facility at Tuwaitha, more commonly known as Location C. This inspection will be under the protection and auspices of coalition forces. The safeguard inspection will begin on or about June 7th. And I'm sure the next person will speak to the actual logistics, but for planning purposes, we and the IAEA expect that this process will likely take a couple weeks. The purpose of the inspection is to inventory and assess the condition of the material that is under IAEA safeguards at the Baghdad yellow-cake storage facility. The material at this facility includes approximately 500 metric tons of safeguarded uranium and several non-fissile radioisotope sources that are not under IAEA safeguards. The uranium is mostly in the form of yellow cake, an isotopically natural form that is an impure oxide. There is a small quantity of low-enriched and depleted uranium. Typically, the IAEA would conduct an NPT safeguards inspection at this location annually. The last inspection was conducted in December of 2002. Given the changed circumstances, the United States has determined it would be helpful to have the IAEA reinventory this location. I would like to underscore, though, that this is a cooperative effort. The coalition will be providing necessary transportation, security and other minimal logistics to the team, which will consist of seven IAEA experts. The safeguards activity will be led by the IAEA under the protection and auspices of coalition forces. To ensure safety and protection, coalition forces will accompany the IAEA at all times. Coalition nuclear experts will also participate in the inspection and the inventory. Upon completion of the inventory, the IAEA will repackage the material as necessary, reseal all safeguarded rooms, buildings and containers as appropriate, and the coalition will, as appropriate, assist in this effort. I want to note that this access to the IAEA is not an IAEA inspection pursuant to the U.N. Security Council resolutions and does not set any precedent for future IAEA involvement in Iraq in any disarmament or UNSCR-related activity. And lastly, we expect that the IAEA will share their findings with us as we work cooperatively on this effort. Thank you.

Senior Defense Official: All right. If we could bring the theater up, then, and have our senior military official give you a few thoughts, and then we'll take a few questions. Sir, go ahead.

Senior Military Official: Broken sound here, so if I miss your question or you miss some of what I say, I'll be glad to go back to it. The IAEA team arrived -- (Audio break.) -- arrived in Kuwait. They were met by senior leaders from the land component. Today, the 5th of June, they are preparing and packing their gear for deployment to (Audio break.) tomorrow. (Audio break.) -- also -- (Audio break.) -- some equipment that they asked us -- (Audio break.) -- when they arrived. We are checking that out and loading it up today. (Audio break.) -- shovels, some -- (Audio break.). And so we'll fly them and their gear to -- (Audio break.) -- some protective equipment tomorrow, such as helmets -- (Audio break.)

Senior Defense Official: Let me interrupt you a moment.

Senior Military Official: Yes.

Senior Defense Official: Your sound is breaking up, and so we are going to attempt to take your picture down and go audio only. So hold the one and let's see if we can't make that adjustment.

Senior Military Official: Okay. (Pause for adjustments, off-mike conferrals.)

Q: May I ask a question while you do this?

Senior Defense Official: Sure.

Q: Could you explain why this doesn't set a precedent for IAEA access? Isn't IAEA access a good thing, especially as part of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty?

Senior Defense Official: Well, as I noted in the opening remarks, they are coming in under the safeguards agreement, which was signed with Iraq in 1972. And therefore the inspection is under those auspices, which is, of course, driven by the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. So it's under that mandate by which they are coming in.

Q: So why not set the precedent that IAEA is going to have access to this stuff? What's the sensitivity there?

Senior Defense Official: Well, we've determined that we -- of course, given the security environment, given the nature of what's happening in-country, that the United States has the resources to handle the disarmament and other tasks. That responsibility has been -- it was also acknowledged in the recent U. N. Resolution 1483 -- and we feel that we're capable of handling that task.

Q: What vulnerability does having IAEA in there, with whatever powers they would normally have, give you? Do you have some security concern about them, or what?

Senior Defense Official: Well, of course, they have said to us that they have concerns about their own security. And of course, we know about the nature of the security environment in Iraq. So, those concerns, of course, do exist. There are also other important tasks for the IAEA to take on around the world under its safeguards mandate, not least of which include countries like North Korea and Iran.

Senior Defense Official: Well let's see if we've got the general back. General, do we have you back on the line?

Senior Military Official: We do. I picked up on a second line, so I'm ready to go.

Senior Defense Official: And you're clear now. Why don't you take this from the top, so we can get the opening part of your statement for the people who are here, and then proceed, please.

Senior Military Official: Certainly. The IAEA team arrived last night in Kuwait City. They were met by senior leaders from our Land Component Command. Today, they're preparing and packing their gear for deployment up here to Baghdad tomorrow. And they -- we'll fly them up tomorrow and link them up with some additional protective equipment for their personal protection and security, such as helmets and tactical vests for ballistic protection, et cetera. Tomorrow, we will -- we'll travel with them up here with some of our people who are in Kuwait. And we'll provide them, from our U.S. Army Nuclear and Chemical Agency, USANCA, and the Defense Threat Reduction Agency -- some of our team members will provide them with additional technical assistance, and will work with them in a joint way as they conduct this inventory and assessment. They'll get some briefings and some mission preparation work tomorrow. And then the mission is scheduled, as was said earlier, on the 7th of June. That's when we'll start. While out there on the site, the land component will provide life support, such as food, water, shelter, some work support equipment such as forklifts or those kinds of things, as well as any medical

support and security that might be needed. Tuwaitha, as has been stated earlier, is about a 23,000-acre facility that's about 20 kilometers to the southeast of Baghdad. And Site Charlie, where radiological materials, principally yellow cake were stored, consists of three buildings, and they're surrounded by a fence and a wall of concrete barriers about 12 feet tall on three sides. According to reports from civilians in the area, on or about the 10th of March, Iraqi army forces who were guarding the site reportedly left their weapons -- some of their weapons with the local civilians -- and abandoned the site. We also believe, from talking to the local civilians, that on or about 20 March, the 20th of March, the civilians guarding the site abandoned it also. And, of course, we were conducting our attack across the Kuwaiti border on the 21st. On the 7th of April, U.S. Marines from our land component first arrived at Tuwaitha Site Charlie and assumed the security, and remained there until the 20th of April, when they turned over control of the facility to U.S. Army soldiers from another unit. And Tuwaitha Site Charlie has been secured and under the positive control of U.S. forces since the 7th of April. When the U.S. forces first arrived, they found the Tuwaitha site facility, Tuwaitha Charlie facility, in disarray. The front gate was open and unsecured, and the fence line and barrier wall on the back side of the facility had been breached. And the troops reported that there were no seals on the exterior doors of the buildings. But since taking control of Tuwaitha Site Charlie, no thieves or looters have been allowed inside the facility. We have taken several positive steps to try to mitigate any risks from Tuwaitha Charlie to either the soldiers or the population in the surrounding area or to the environment. And I'll list of a couple of those. Between the 8th and 10th of April, a team conducted an initial survey outside the buildings at Tuwaitha Charlie, and they determined that additional exploitation was required beyond their capability. And so the exploitation task force, the folks responsible for that operation, decided to keep the security at the site and to deny access to anyone except properly trained personnel. On the 18th of April, some Iraqi scientists from the Iraqi Atomic Energy Commission, who had worked at the facility, were allowed in to check the site and to mitigate any radiological hazards within their capability. And they moved some sources into a building from the concrete outside. On the 12th of May, our Threat Reduction Agency personnel arrived in Iraq and began planning for its operation at Tuwaitha Charlie. And between the 15th and 20th of May, our task force disablement and elimination team conducted its technical assessment and an inventory of what was there. And from what we know at this time, the quantity of materials we have found at the site exceeds the quantity of materials that we had assessed would be present at the site. On the 18th of May, a direct support team teamed up with the Coalition Provisional Authority personnel and some additional people from IAEA, the Iraqi Atomic Energy Commission, and they decided to conduct a buy-back operation because the troops were starting to hear stories that some of the barrels -- there were barrels in the local community that resembled those that were at the site.

The team went to two villages and offered to pay \$3 a piece for any items that may have come from the facility, and they pointed out what these items might look like. The team recovered over 100 barrels of various sizes and shapes and condition, as well as five radioactive sources and some other items. But virtually none of the people admitted to having taken the items from the facility. They said they had bought them. And indeed, barrels like these are ubiquitous around Iraq. And although there are some similar containers available in markets -- and the same type barrels are sometimes found in people's homes. The team checked the items for radioactivity and also checked the people to reassure them. None of the people registered any radiation above normal background levels. And these barrels of various sizes and shapes and colors -- none of them registered more than background level or slightly above normal background radiation. They then transported the items to Tuwaitha Charlie and secured them. And so, there's no way to tell at this point if they came from Tuwaitha, but they were taken back there just in case, for safety. The technical assessment also determined that outside the fence line at Tuwaitha Charlie, there was negligible risk to the soldiers guarding the site and to the population within a wide area out to a kilometer from the fence line. But the site had apparently been looted before U. S. soldiers arrived. Uranium materials and some other stored materials had been dumped on the floor in places, and in one building, there were a number of radiological sources scattered around the floor. Radiological readings measured only background levels out at the fence line, and readings at the buildings and inside were somewhere between two and 10 times background readings -- background readings. We've been conducting weekly meetings with the Iraqi Atomic Energy Commission, with our coalition forces experts and with the Coalition Provisional Authority experts to continue the way ahead in a joint manner. We've developed a plan and objectives for improvement of the site. This week, the Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine, commonly called CHPPM, arrives from the United States. And they'll conduct a risk assessment on the soldiers and Marines who were there and those who are still there. And the purpose of that is to reassure those soldiers and Marines, but also to determine what, if any, risks they might have occurred -- incurred, rather, from being at -- near the site. Together with the Iraqi Atomic Energy Commission and the Iraqi Ministry of Health, CHPPM will also help to conduct a wider search and a health risk assessment of the surrounding civilian area, out to about five kilometers. Iraqi scientists and physicians began that work this week by conducting an initial assessment and a census of those people out there. We also formed a joint team with the Iraqi experts and repaired and sealed the buildings as a further measure of safety, so that even if the weather changed to something severe that we hadn't expected, the buildings would still be secure. We've also recruited a 100-man Iraqi guard force. And we're in the process of training them so that once they meet standards, they'll eventually take over the security. And of course, IAEA arrives in Baghdad this weekend to begin its work. And that's

about all I have for opening comments.

Senior Defense Official: Thank you very much. Let me come back on just two points to underscore some things that the general said. And General, if I've got them wrong, make sure that you correct me. With respect to the barrels that have been recovered, it's my understanding, General, that it's very difficult to know how many of those barrels might have been associated with this site at any time. Is that true?

Senior Military Official: That's true. The -- some of the barrels have some markings that are similar to some of those that are inside the site. And I might point out that the ones inside the site are not routine in size or what they're made of or what the markings are. But while some of the barrels that we recovered had markings similar to those, others had no markings at all. So, it's just about impossible to determine if they came from there.

Senior Defense Official: Thank you. And then the second point that I wanted to underscore for you here is that the damage, as best we can tell, to the site occurred before our forces arrived. And as the general pointed out, they arrived on the 7th of April, as they were moving from their positions forward toward Baghdad. Is that right General?

Senior Military Official: That's correct.

Senior Defense Official: So they came on this site as part of the campaign moving toward Baghdad. So, are there -- I'm sure there are -- questions. We've probably got 10 minutes or so to take some questions. So, why don't -- General, I'll orchestrate them from here -- and throw them over to you, as appropriate. Or if you have any reason to interrupt, just go right ahead.

Q: Thank you. First I'd like to ask you a question, official number one. What was the hold-up -- following up on this first question you got, what was the hold-up with letting IAEA in? Why not let them in earlier? They asked so many times, and they really wanted to get in. What was the problem?

Senior Defense Official: I think that this is a question of assuring for security and transport and support in order to be able to do the job. I think it's a problem that still persists throughout the country, as you know. And so, given the importance associated with the site, upon their request, we've decided to do this, to take care of this site. And for the rest of the question that was asked earlier, you know, we'll defer that till later.

Q: And my follow-up is for anybody who can answer it out of any of

you. When we were looking at the museums and the antiquities that were looted, we've been told that at first blush, a lot of the place just looked like it had been ransacked by, you know, average folks who came in and were just destroying things and dumping things on the floor. But when they got further into the facility, they realized that there was perhaps an inside job or some people who were pretty savvy about it. Is there any sense that anyone was looking for something in particular at this site and was looting anything in particular, an inside job of any kind?

Senior Defense Official: I think it's too -- by analogy, I don't know; and by fact, we don't know. So we'll have to work that problem.

Q: This is Jim Mannion from AFP.

Senior Defense Official: General, did you have anything to add to my answer?

Senior Military Official: No, I agree with that. We just don't know about those antiquities at the museum.

Senior Defense Official: We'll do the antiquities in another brief sometime, huh?

Senior Military Official: Yes.

Q: One of the concerns that has been expressed here is that radiological material may have been stolen from the site, dispersed in a way that could wind up in the hands of terrorists or other people. Is there any evidence that you have that that may have happened? Is that a possibility?

Senior Defense Official: General, on the factual question, are you able to answer the question whether we can at this point tell if any material has, in fact, been removed from the site?

Senior Military Official: We have no evidence here that any of the material has been moved from the site. We saw -- we found a small quantity of yellow cake outside the building, on the ground, but we recovered that and put it back under safe conditions. And so we have no evidence that anything has been stolen at this point.

Senior Defense Official: So in answer to the questioning, part of the reason for wanting to get through the survey and go through the inventories and so forth is to find out what we may have started with and where we are now. I



am fearful, however -- if you recall, the general said that there's more stuff inside the place than they expected to find. An interesting question will be, is there more stuff there than the IAEA would have expected to find; and if there is, what does it mean? And that's all part of what we're going to have to go through here over the next period of time. Pam?

Q: Defense Official number one sort of presaged my question, which is -- this is Pam Hess with UPI -- what do you make of the fact that the IAEA did an inspection of this place and you're finding more material there after looting than they assessed was there prior to that? And can you tell us a little bit more about the five, I guess radiological items that you said you bought back from people in the surrounding villages? And can you tell us what weapons-usefulness yellow cake might have?

Senior Defense Official: Over to you, General.

Senior Military Official: I'm going to have to defer on the point about usefulness for yellow cake. I'm told it's normally used as something that could be used to enrich other uranium products, but I'm not the expert on that, so I'll defer.

As far as the items that were recovered from the buy-back program, I'll just read off a couple of things that they found. One was a blue case marked as a moisture density gauge with .0085 cesium 137. That's the kind of item we're talking about, some sort of measuring device or industrial or scientific device.

Q: (Off mike.) -- IAEA.

Senior Military Official: And the other part of your question I didn't get.

Q: The other part of the question was, what do you make of the fact that the IAEA inspected this facility in December 2002 and surveyed it and found less stuff than you-all have found now after it was looted?

Senior Military Official: Well, first of all I'd say I have not seen an official inventory. That's part of what this will be. But we had information from a number of sources as to what we thought was there, and we actually found more than what we thought was there. What we thought may not have been absolutely accurate, because we didn't have that official inventory. But it also probably wouldn't be useful to speculate about what might have -- how the additional stuff might have gotten there. We'll wait until the inventory is done.

Q: The Iraqi scientists you mentioned, that you brought back into the plant, did any -- did they tell you whether there were plans beforehand to transfer

any of this material, either take it out of the country, sell it, disperse it to any other groups, do anything with it; about what the plans were? Were they surprised that the guards just abandoned the plant?

Senior Military Official: They were surprised that the guards abandoned the plant. And none of them we talked to up to this point have talked about any plans to try to move this material out of the country.

Q: Richard Sisk, New York Daily News. The yellow cake -- what is it? Why is it a matter of concern? And what do you now do with it?

Senior Military Official: Well, I'm not a scientist, but I'll tell you my definition of it. "Yellow cake" is a common term that's used in the industry for one of the refined products of uranium ore, as it goes through the refining process. And this is what's left at one of the lower levels of refinement. It's about the consistency of yellow cornmeal, more or less. It is a heavy metal, but it looks like -- something like -- yellow cornmeal. And a 55-gallon drum of it would weigh about 500 pounds, is what I'm told.

Q: This is Will Dunham with Reuters. What will you now do with it?

Senior Defense Official: Oh. What -- well, what they'll do, I think, as Defense Official 2 told you, is they will survey the site, decide how best to put it back in order. The IAEA will probably then take those drums and so forth and reseal them and keep them under their -- and we will then keep the site under security. And its final disposition I don't know. That is, you know, to be decided as we go through this.

Q: And can this stuff be used somewhere along the chain to make a weapon?

Senior Defense Official: Well let me get you a very explicit answer on that. I don't want to not -- to mislead you in any way about what its utility is. So I've asked [name of official deleted] to get you a paragraph that will tell you why people are concerned about this -- that yellow cake.

Staff: We've got time for about -- (Off mike.).

Senior Defense Official: Two more. Yeah.

Q: This is Will Dunham with Reuters. You can't rule out the possibility that radiological material, and potentially in large amounts, has been stolen from the site, can you?

And also, what is the concern about the IAEA having a robust role inside Iraq to help the search and to lend expertise? I mean, they are experts in this area.

Senior Defense Official: I can't, I think, at this moment say anything more than I have already said to you, which is we came on the site on the 7th, found it in the condition that it's in and have taken the measures that we've taken to secure it as we found it. Part of what's going to take place here is the IAEA will do its survey, they will match it over against their 2002 review results, and we'll get an answer to your question at that point. I can't rule in -- out. I can only tell you what I told you: We found it in the condition on the 7th, we've secured it, they'll come in and they'll do the inventory and we'll get an answer to your question. I think that's the way -- the thing to wait for. It would be a mistake, in my opinion, to speculate on this subject until we get more facts. And that's where we're headed.

And you had one question?

Q: The second part of my question was about what's the concern about the IAEA having a robust role in Iraq?

Senior Defense Official: The concern that we have -- it has to do with the circumstances under which these kinds of operations are taking place, security in the country and things of that matter. And I'll defer to the diplomats who are working this problem. I mean, you need to talk with them.

Q: So it's only a security issue? It's not that you don't want them there?

Senior Defense Official: From my point of view -- that is the Defense Department point of view -- we're responsible for the protection of these people, their transport, supply, medical care and so forth, all right? And we are trying to get that done even as we're doing other things. In terms of the broader questions, you'll have to talk with the other people about that.

Q: This is Matt Kelley from the Associated Press. Is there any indication so far that there were prohibited activities going on at this site? In other words, that the Iraqis were doing things in terms of developing nuclear weapons or other WMD at this site that they weren't supposed to be doing?

Senior Defense Official: General, you may have another view on this, but I don't think we can give you a definitive answer, again, one way or the other. Remember, he said to you the site's 23,000- acres -- is it -- large -- of which there are these three buildings which have been our immediate and abiding concern

since the 7th of April. So, as the exploitation process goes forward, as the DTRA teams get in there, as we do more of the work that we've told you we're going to do, you know, we'll come back with an answer on that one. I'm afraid that we need to go.

Staff: We're running out of time.

Q: Can you explain how many other sites there are like this that you all may take a look at? Nuclear --

Senior Defense Official: There were -- we identified something on the order of 20 to 30 sites. We have been through all but a handful; I think we're at less than 10. And they are slowly working their way down through them. They've been secured in the same fashion -- the sites that we have not been through -- or completed, rather; let me be clear about that; that we have not completed the review and the exploitation -- they, like this site, have been secured under, and so forth. General, do you have anything to add to that?

Senior Military Official: No, that's correct. I mean, we could go to the larger list of sites and all of that math that we sometimes go through, but what you've said is correct.

Q: Just one thing to clarify. You said that the site was secured on April 7th, but I believe that there were reports that looting continued or people were breaking into the site soon after that.

Senior Defense Official: That's what I'm telling you. We've looked at this. Our people were there on the 7th of April. They've been on the site since the 7th -- on Site C since the 7th of April. And as far as we are able to tell you, no unauthorized activity took place on that site that we are aware of. I mean, they have been there, they've been there for the entire period of time.

Q: You're referring though, specifically, to those buildings?

Senior Defense Official: Those buildings, not to the 23,000 acres. So there's a whole larger complex out there that had not been secured. And, General, as I understand it, we have now moved people to begin working over the larger site; is that true?

Senior Military Official: We have additional security at the larger site. You see, part of the problem is that the site is so large that people can come in and loot a building or wander around before somebody finds them. But not at the core of the facility, where the materials that we're trying to safeguard will

actually take place. So, my belief is, as I've seen the reports here and watched some of the people try to walk in, our soldiers catch them, they put them to work; they have them do a full work detail during the day, if they catch them wandering around inside the outer 23,000-acre fence line. And if they're caught a second time, we put them in a confinement facility for a longer period. So we're not allowing any looters, any thieves at all, and have not, to get into Tuwaitha Site Charlie since the 7th of April.

Senior Defense Official: All right. So have we got that distinction clear? Bigger facility -- tougher. The smaller site C, they've been on it since the 7th of April. Okay, thank you.

Q: (Off mike.) -- the other 20 or 30?

Senior Defense Official: You know, we'll have to get -- I mean, give me time. The more I know and -- I mean, we'll tell you as we learn. All right? Thanks.

Q: But, I mean to say, because an important part of what we're going to say is that there might be 20 or 30 other sites that might have had looting, and I don't want to say that if it's --

Senior Defense Official: I don't know the answer to that. General, do you have any other indication that other places on that 23,000 acres may have been subject --

Q: I'm talking about the 20 to 30 other sites.

Senior Defense Official: Oh, the 20 to 30 other sites. No, I don't know about that. Let me -- I can try to get you an answer. That one I can't promise today, but I'll try to get you an answer on that one. That's on the 20 to 30 sites.

Q: Right.

Senior Defense Official: Okay.

Q: Thank you.

Senior Defense Official: Thanks, folks.

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