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Menu

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### NEWS

[DoD News](#)  
[Advisories](#)  
[Contracts](#)  
[Live Briefings](#)  
[Photos](#)  
[Releases](#)  
[Slides](#)  
[Speeches](#)  
[Today in DoD](#)  
[Transcripts](#)

[American Forces](#)  
[News](#)  
[Articles](#)  
[Radio](#)  
[Television](#)  
[Special Reports](#)

[DoD Search](#)

[About News](#)  
[News Archive](#)  
[News by E-mail](#)

[Other News Sources](#)

**Presenter:** Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld

Tuesday, December 9, 2003 1:31 p.m. EST

### Defense Department Operational Update Briefing

SEC. RUMSFELD: Good afternoon.

First, let me express the chairman and my condolences to the families of those civilian casualties last weekend in Afghanistan. Our forces take great care to avoid civilian casualties, and needless to say, they and we deeply regret it.

I returned Sunday from NATO meetings in Brussels and meetings in Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Iraq. Azerbaijan and Georgia are important partners in the global war on terror. Each have indicated a desire to strengthen their ties to NATO and to further link their countries to the West.

In Georgia, the transition leaders are working to set Georgia on a path of reform -- political, economic and defense -- and to greater integration with the West. We wish them success in what obviously are important months ahead.

This was my fifth visit to Afghanistan since the country was liberated. Each time I return, I see progress. Micro-businesses are flourishing. The highway linking Kandahar to the capital in Kabul is finished and will be dedicated, I believe, in a day or two. The road linking Kabul with Mazar is near completion.

Fortunately, there is strong growth, with very little inflation. President Karzai has strengthened his leadership team. Minister of defense -- Ministry of Defense reforms have been initiated. Demobilization of militias is beginning. And all in all, the progress is encouraging.

In Iraq, we were in Kirkuk, Baghdad, to meet with U.S. military and also with those folks that are training the new recruits in the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps. Across the country, Iraqi security forces now number close to 160,000, are assuming more responsibility for the security of their country.

In Kirkuk, General Odierno reports that today nearly all crime is now dealt with by the 2,200 coalition-trained Iraqi security police. Joint patrols have largely ended, and Iraqis have stepped forward in that particular area to patrol on their own. I should underline that each portion of the country is different, and that's not the pattern everywhere, to be sure. But it is the pattern there. There's a city jail, a functioning Iraqi court system. So Iraqis now can begin to handle crime, from arrest to trial to sentencing.

As Iraqis take on more responsibility, the U.S. presence in the Assini has gone down from three battalions to a couple of hundred soldiers, with our forces assisting in various types of reconstruction.

Meanwhile, coalition forces continue taking the battle to the terrorists. Commanders we met

with in Kirkuk and Baghdad report they have made good progress in the past several weeks. That's not to say that attacks are over; they're not. We can expect that the terrorists will continue to adjust their tactics. The road ahead, I'm afraid, will be difficult, and dangers do remain. But the coalition will prevail, and we will continue training Iraqis to step forward to serve their country. We'll continue taking the battle to the terrorists. And as the president has said, the coalition will stay as long as it takes to finish the job, and leave only when the task is finished.

General Myers?

GEN. MYERS: Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Good afternoon. Let me first extend the secretary's condolences and my condolences to the families of the soldiers who were killed in yesterday's Striker accident, as well as the soldier killed in a drive-by shooting at a gas station in Mosul. These soldiers made the ultimate sacrifice for their country, and we are very, very grateful for their service.

Operations throughout Iraq continue. Over the last six weeks, we have been aggressively attacking former regime elements who are attacking the future of Iraq. While the number of attacks on coalition forces are down, they do continue, as witnessed by the truck bomb that exploded west of Mosul earlier this morning. The alert actions of the soldiers on the ground prevented this attack from achieving its intended loss of life. Our soldiers also continue to reduce the impact of other attacks, such as improvised explosive devices, as we counter enemy tactics.

We also continue to apprehend former regime elements, including those suspected of attacking coalition forces and the Iraqi people. Over the last 24 hours, 76 suspected enemy personnel were captured, and we rounded up 66 grenades and confiscated 4,200 small-arm rounds, along with three SA-7s.

Operations in Afghanistan continue as well. Operation Avalanche is designed to destroy anti-coalition forces across the southeastern portion of Afghanistan. By doing this, we deny the enemy's ability to operate in this region. Coalition forces will be able to establish a permissive environment and allow for long-term reconstruction efforts to take hold in that part of Afghanistan.

And with that, we'll take your questions.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Charlie?

Q Mr. Secretary, General Myers said that the number of attacks is going down, the number of attacks on U.S. troops, as have your commanders there.

SEC. RUMSFELD: I think it's a bit early to call it a trend. It's a fact, but where it will be next week or the week after I think remains to be seen.

Q Nevertheless, there were 50 soldiers who were injured in this attack today, in this blast outside a U.S. base. A U.S. helicopter was forced down, made a hard landing after coming under fire. Nobody was hurt badly in that. And a Sunni mosque was also bombed.

While you say the security situation appears to be improving, at least for the time being, are these attacks --

SEC. RUMSFELD: The number of attacks have gone down.

Q Is the security situation, then, improving? And are these attacks becoming, I guess more -- are they becoming more effective, despite the fact that the number is going down?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, I think I answered the part whether the security situation is improving. I think it's too early to call it a trend line, and we'll just have to see. We'll just have to go

through the next month or two or three and see how effective the adjustment in tactics and techniques and procedures that the U.S military forces are adopting -- how effective they are. It's also true that the terrorists are adjusting their tactics. And they have in the past, they undoubtedly will continue to go to school on what we do, and we'll go to school on what they do. And it is -- it will be a process that will go on for a period, and it will end favorably.

Q You've changed your tactics in recent weeks to perhaps in many instances destroy buildings where attacks are being planned or arms are being stored for attacks on U.S. troops. Israeli security sources are saying the United States is considering possibly increasing attacks on insurgents, possibly dressed as Arabs. Have you any plans to do that?

GEN. MYERS: You know, one of the things we try not to do here in the Pentagon is design tactics for the field. I don't -- I have no idea. I have no idea.

SEC. RUMSFELD: I have heard nothing like that.

GEN. MYERS: But let me take on a little bit about the continued attacks and what's going on over there. If you were to ask any of the division commanders or General Sanchez or any of his folks, I think they would tell you that our ability to gather intelligence and target specifically folks that are in the bomb-making business has gone up dramatically. That we have had a real spike up in Iraqis coming forward to provide intelligence. So that trend does continue. There are more Iraqis coming forward all the time, and most of these arm caches in many cases are pointed out to us by Iraqis. So there are lots of -- I don't know about the one you mentioned, Charlie, about people dressed up as anything. U.S. soldiers will be dressed up as U.S. soldiers when we do our business. I think that's the way we do our business.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Although with 160,000 Iraqis involved providing their own security, some of which are probably Arabs.

GEN. MYERS: Right. And I was going to --

SEC. RUMSFELD: One would hope.

Q Mr. Secretary, there seems to be somewhat of a disagreement between you and senior Army officers as to the state of readiness. Army officials are saying that into next year, as four divisions rotate back from Iraq, that those four divisions will not be combat ready for three to six months, and that's about 40 percent of the force. I understand that you have a different take on it. Would you clarify your position, please?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Sure. I had a good, long talk with Pete Schoomaker about it yesterday, and there is no difference at all. The metrics are what they are. And the taxpayers pay \$400 billion a year to support the Department of Defense and the men and women in uniform, and the purpose is to deter and defend where appropriate, and, in the case of what's going on now, fight a war.

Obviously, the metrics are designed for peacetime, and they say: Here are the things that one ought to do to be ready to fight a war. Then you go fight a war. Now, at the end of that war, clearly, things have to be reconstituted. This should come as no surprise to anybody.

I think it might be a good idea -- I'm no expert on the subject, but Pete Schoomaker is. And I haven't talked to him about it, but I'm sure he'd be happy to come down and give a briefing and explain what takes place.

I think -- I think that the forces that are coming back have just experienced something that you cannot experience in peacetime. They have just fought a war, and they have developed skills and knowledge about deployments and about combat and about logistics and about redeployment that is -- it's the kind of thing you'd spend billions of dollars conducting an exercise to give them that kind of

experience. And to suggest that they're, therefore, not ready because they weren't back here in peacetime conducting themselves in a manner that would be consistent with the readiness metrics that one would use in peacetime so that you would be prepared to engage in a conflict, is obvious, it's self-evident that they were not back here doing those things.

So clearly, when you look at the metrics, you're going to see, I would guess, any element that was over there in combat is going to have to come back, and they're going to have to get their equipment fixed, they're going to have to engage in the kind of training that their unit is designed to deal with, because they had to not do that during the time they were engaged in battle. And one has to say "Ready for what?" if you're looking at readiness metrics. If you're looking at our metrics, basically they say that you have to do certain things so that you would be ready to fight a war. And these forces are just coming back having just done that.

Do you want to comment on that?

GEN. MYERS: I think that's exactly perfect. And we shouldn't get -- it really is -- we get sometimes tangled up in the metrics that we use because they are peacetime metrics. And everything the secretary said is exactly right. It will take time for these forces to reconstitute themselves. That's been built into the timelines. It's also built into all the risk assessments that we do with the secretary on our readiness for other missions around the globe.

Q I have a follow-up, a quick follow-up on that.

Q Some lawmakers say that --

Q If I could, one quick follow-up on this question, if I may. But supposing there is another war. I mean, there are possibilities out there that could happen fairly quickly. Are we ready to take on another conflict?

GEN. MYERS: Ivan, that's an unqualified yes. That's what I -- maybe it said it too cryptically in the last piece of my little statement there, but that was -- that's something we look at all the time, is the readiness to go carry out the defense strategy that came out of the Quadrennial Defense Review that was conducted a couple of years ago. And we look at that all the time. I mean, it's -- we're almost in continuous process of evaluating our capability to handle future contingencies.

Q Some lawmakers -- Jack Reed, from Rhode Island, and Ike Skelton, from Missouri -- say that this shows the Army is too small, that you need more people, if 40 percent of your Army is not ready. (Pause.) Any comments?

GEN. MYERS: Sure. The -- (laughter) --

Q (Off mike.)

GEN. MYERS: I mean, we --

Q You take it.

GEN. MYERS: I mean --

SEC. RUMSFELD: I'll take it. You take it.

GEN. MYERS: Well, no, I'll take it for a while.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Good. Then I'll play with it.

GEN. MYERS: This is obviously not a new issue. It's an issue, when you use the force as hard as we're using the force right now, that you have to have time to regenerate the force when it comes back

home. This is another thing that you ought to talk to General Schoomaker about.

But if you make the assumption that we're as efficient as we can possibly be today in how we alert, mobilize and deploy our force, then you might come to the conclusion -- and how we utilize military manpower in our services -- if you think we're just really running to close to 100 percent efficiency in that business, then you could come to the conclusion that we need, perhaps, more end strength. But I don't think any service chief will say that we've got all our processes down and we've got our military manpower organized as efficiently as they can be organized for the security environment we're in. I mean --

Q I don't know what you mean by that. Did you mean you should draw on the Guard more than you are now --

GEN. MYERS: I'm talking about when we draw on the Guard or Reserve, that the mobilization time lines are long, and the question is, do they need to be that long? Are there other methods for getting people ready? Are there other paradigms we could use? And that's exactly what we're looking at and -- to make us more efficient in how we bring these units and present them and provide them to combatant commanders.

Q So the bottom line is, you wouldn't agree with the lawmakers who say you need more forces in the Army?

GEN. MYERS: At this time, I don't think we can say that. And that's not to say that the United States Army is not very, very busy. In the next four months, we're going to pull off a logistics feat that'll rival any in history, I think, as we move a major part of the Army. Well over the majority of the Army combat units and a lot of the Reserve component will move -- those in Iraq, home, and those here in the United States and other places in the world, to Iraq or to Afghanistan. It's going to be a very big project that we've been planning for a very long time. So there's going to be a lot of turbulence in the system, as you would expect. But I don't know that that necessarily means that you need more end-strength at this point.

SEC. RUMSFELD: We have 1.4 million men and women in uniform, and we have another 700,000 to 800,000 in the Guard and Reserve. That comes to 2.15 million. And we have 123,000 in Iraq, and they'll be coming home, a large fraction, in the early part of next year -- January through May, and they will be replaced by roughly the same number. That is 250,000 out of 2.2 million men and women in uniform.

If at -- I would just add to what Dick said. If at any moment there was an analysis that suggested one of the services was too small, obviously we would recommend an increase in it. We just don't have that kind of analysis at the present time. And I don't believe anyone else does.

Q Mr. Secretary, what do you think that does for the mission to have so many of the most experienced commanders and troops leaving at, you know, essentially the same time -- I know they're being transitioned -- and then having so many people who are just coming in and experiencing these things for the first time? What does that do to the mission?

SEC. RUMSFELD: It is a very important issue. We spend a great deal of time on. Dick Myers and I talk about it a good deal, and General Abizaid and I discussed it in Baghdad on Saturday.

Turbulence is always undesirable. The turnover of people -- you lose situational awareness, you lose relationships, you lose the experience. And that goes to your readiness question. The people going over are ready, but the people there are experienced and really know their stuff. And who would you rather have there? So what we're going to have to do is to manage that transition very carefully. There's going to have to be overlap. We're going to have to be sensitive to the fact that the knowledge that's built up there and the relationships have to be transferred and they have to be transferred in a manner that's appropriate.

The one thing I would say, however, is that the forces going in, according to General Abizaid, are going to be better designed for the current tasks than the ones that will be leaving. So that's a good thing. So there are some pluses and minuses, and we're attentive to it, and it's appropriate to be worried about it.

Yes?

Q Mr. Secretary, over the weekend, Senator Hillary Clinton again repeated her charge that the administration's planning on Iraq seems to be driven by the political schedule. And there have also been a number of reports where they quote, "unknown Army colonel" saying that they believe that their instructions they're getting are basically tied to politics and the political calendar in terms of the force. I wonder what is your latest thinking for the force in Iraq.

SEC. RUMSFELD: I'm not going to get into politics, and that's obviously politics. The department does not operate on political schedules or calendars. We don't discuss them. We don't deal with that. The commanders in the field are doing that which they believe is appropriate. And they are the ones that are making those decisions. And I don't doubt for a minute that you could find some colonel or some major somewhere who wants to say something, but the truth is to the contrary.

(To General Myers) Do you want to comment on that?

GEN. MYERS: No, that's exactly right. And the guidance we've been given in the military is to do the right thing. And as you know, on the current path to Iraqi sovereignty, if it happens in June, the end of June as currently on the schedule, if it happens in that way, that doesn't say anything about U.S. force strength in Iraq or any of that business. That is being worked on a -- in conjunction with, but as the security piece of that, but it says nothing about troop strength.

SEC. RUMSFELD: That's an important point. Any implication that a transfer of sovereignty means U.S. forces leave is just false. The security circumstance on the ground is what will determine the numbers and the types and the length of time that they're there.

Q And what is your latest position on the troop strength? Have you given -- have you asked military commanders to reassess that situation? What is your latest thinking on that?

GEN. MYERS: They reassess that situation every time I have a phone call with general Abizaid, which is essentially daily, or at least every other day, we have a reassessment of that situation. And currently it is what it is, and the troop rotations have been announced. There are no new additions to those troop rotations at the current time. There might be, but there haven't been. There are none planned that I know of.

SEC. RUMSFELD: And it could go higher OR lower.

GEN. MYERS: And it could go higher or lower than what is planned. And that is a call that General Abizaid makes. As you know, he's spending by far the majority of his time forward to help make judgments on those matters with General Sanchez and his folks in the field.

Q Mr. Secretary, I wonder if I could get your thinking, please, on the tactic of targeted killing, given what happened in Afghanistan in the last several days ago. There are reports that there are plans to do the same now in Iraq, acting on intelligence concerning the whereabouts of midlevel anti-coalition leaders, special units having been formed to do this. I'm wondering if you can comment on that, as well as the report that Israeli experts are helping to train this force and will actually help advise this force.

SEC. RUMSFELD: On the latter portion, the answer is no, certainly not to my knowledge. I've

not heard that at all.

And with respect to an Iraqi unit --

Q American unit.

SEC. RUMSFELD: An American unit -- (to General Myers) -- Maybe you better answer that.

GEN. MYERS: Well, I think we've answered it before, that there are -- we have forces trained to go after the high-value targets of interest to us over there. And when I'm talking about the high-value targets, I'm talking about essentially the top 55 that were in the deck of cards, if you will; and there are a little over 200 more that we're very interested in. But the top 55, we have a unit that focuses on them and tries to fuse all the intel with operations to go get them. Saddam Hussein would be one of their targets; al-Douri would another one of those targets. I think we've gotten 44 out of the 55, so their numbers -- they're becoming an endangered species.

SEC. RUMSFELD: But the phrase -- to use the phrase "targeted killing" I think is a misunderstanding of the fact that we're in a war where, obviously, the people who don't surrender, who are terrorists trying to kill innocent Iraqis and coalition forces, are people we want to stop. We would be happy to capture them, we'd be happy to have them surrender, and if they don't, we'd be happy to kill them. And that's what's going on. But the implication or the connotation of "targeted killing" I think is unfortunate because it suggests an appetite to do that, which is not the case. The goal is to stop terrorists from killing innocent men, women and children, Iraqis, and coalition forces. It seems like a perfectly logical thing to me.

Q But what happened in Afghanistan, sir, doesn't that point out the risks of doing this --

GEN. MYERS: There are risks, there are risks anytime you go after any target. But I can tell you, the kind of vetting that the process goes through, from the beginnings of intelligence to the final operation, is exquisite. And we're not going to be perfect, and we found that out in Afghanistan. And we haven't been perfect.

But I would offer, and would offer again, that both in Afghanistan and Iraq, that the amount of force brought to bear, that the progress that was made, the success we've had, has never been done with more care about bringing innocents into the line of fire. And that will continue. And that's what American service men and women do.

Q Mr. Secretary, can you explain the thinking behind the forming of this Iraqi task force, drawing from militias, to go after high-value targets in Iraq, and where that developed from and the thinking behind it.

SEC. RUMSFELD: I can't do it well; I can do it imperfectly. And I don't know where it originated. But my understanding of the situation is that not units, but individuals from a number of existing militias have been brought together in a single place -- Baghdad, as I recall -- to be used as a unit. And it has the advantage of adding additional Iraqis to the fight, which is important. They speak the language. They know the neighborhood. It has the advantage also of bringing different competence and different ethnic groups in together to be engaged in defending the coalition and the Governing Council and the people that are trying to put that country on a path to a civil society.

I don't believe it's formed yet. I believe it's in process. It's been decided, I think, and it's in the process. But where it originated, I don't know.

GEN. MYERS: I think probably from two areas, one by Iraqis wanting to do more to help themselves and one by coalition forces and General Abizaid wanting Iraqis to provide more help and to provide the things that they bring -- the language capabilities, understanding the culture, knowing the neighborhood, if you will -- to the fight. So I think it was a merger of those two things.

Q Just to clarify, you said U.S. commanders are not consulting with Israelis about tactics used in fighting terrorists in the Palestinian conflict there?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, I don't think that was the question.

Q (Off mike.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: I think the question was cast a different way. I --

Q Okay. Let me phrase it --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Who U.S. military people may be meeting with -- we've got military relations all across the globe with people, and I'm not going to stand here say that nobody from Country X has ever uttered a word about anything to some American military person, because I just -- I can't prove that.

Q You're saying specifically that the --

SEC. RUMSFELD: The suggestion that was made in the earlier question -- the answer -- I answered correctly, and that's no.

Q Well, Mr. Secretary, just to follow up on that, because there's been a lot of reporting about the sort of Israeli --

SEC. RUMSFELD: That doesn't make it so.

Q So that's why I'm asking to hear from the horse's mouth --

SEC. RUMSFELD: So to speak.

Q -- about whether or not -- because the reporting has suggested that the United States has been consulting with Israel in order to adopt, perhaps, some of the Israeli counterinsurgency tactics in Iraq. And the concern that's been voiced about that is that it could be counterproductive and alienate some of the --

SEC. RUMSFELD: And I said: not to my knowledge.

(To the general.) And what do you say?

GEN. MYERS: Not to my knowledge.

SEC. RUMSFELD: What else can we do for you? (Laughter.) I don't know what else I can say.

Q Mr. Secretary --

Q Mr. Secretary --

Q Mr. Secretary, how would you measure what it would mean to win the war in Iraq with the insurgents? And do you think the United States and its partners are winning?

SEC. RUMSFELD: The -- I guess the answer would be that the Iraqi people would have assumed responsibility for governing their country, taken over sovereignty. The economy would be on a path so that people would continue to come back to the country rather than leave the country. They would vote with their feet and vote for the future of that country. And third, that the Iraqis would have taken over not the external security responsibilities but a large portion, if not all, of the internal security responsibilities for their own country. And that it be one country, that it not be a threat to its neighbors,



and that it have a governance system that is respectful of the diverse elements within the country, religious and ethnic.

Now, is that going to happen fast? No. That's going to take some time. It's taken time in every country on the face of the Earth when they go from a dictatorship to something like that. But that's the vision. That's the direction. And that's the hope of the coalition countries.

Q Do you have to capture or kill the vast majority of all the former regime loyalists?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Already have. I don't know what it is. What is it, 40 out of –

GEN. MYERS: Forty-four out of 55.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Forty-four out of 55 are captured or dead.

Q Well, there are hundreds or thousands, probably.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Oh. Oh. Oh. I thought you were talking about --

GEN. MYERS: Can I answer the part about winning for just a second?

SEC. RUMSFELD: You bet.

GEN. MYERS: I would say we are winning. I mean, clearly we're winning. Bret heard this the other night, so you don't need to listen to this part, Bret.

But if we could beam down any soldier from any part of Iraq -- Baghdad, Fallujah, from the 82nd, 101st, the 4th ID, any soldier, you pick 'em, random, stand here and say, "Are we winning?" we'd get by far the majority, probably 99 percent, would say, "Absolutely."

A 21-year-old I met at Walter Reed, he said, "I felt like a rock star over there. Everywhere I went, the children and the adults wanted to take their pictures with me. I'm an artilleryman."

I said, "Well, what were you doing?"

"I'm an artilleryman, but I was helping with the town council in Kirkuk." And he said, "When I got injured and they said I had to go back to the States to be healed," he said, "I didn't want to leave, because where could a 21-year old have this impact on a country and have it appreciated?"

So there is not a question about we're winning. There's not a question if we're going to win. Now, that doesn't mean there are not going to be many more challenges. That does not mean that the Iraqi people, that the international coalition that's over there -- by the way, now joined by the Japanese -- I don't know if you've seen the statement, but it's a very powerful statement from the prime minister of Japan -- that this international coalition is not going to let a regime like the former regime elements that are fighting us win. We're going to win. That's it. And it's not going to be easy. Nothing worthwhile is ever easy.

Q I'm trying to understand how you're going to know when you've won.

GEN. MYERS: The secretary went through that, I think in very good order.

Q This is for General Myers. Could you explain the rationale behind the detention of al-Douri's family? It's been criticized by the rights group Amnesty International as being a potential violation of Geneva Convention and other international law.

GEN. MYERS: I don't know what details are out there, but I do know that al-Douri is on one of

our "most wanted" lists. Obviously, he was to begin with. And that we feel that he is somehow involved in the violence perpetrated against Iraqis and the coalition. And so we are using means available to try to find him.

Q And the question, if you'd speak generally on the policy of detaining family members to use as leverage against someone that you're looking for, how is that legal? Is it legal?

GEN. MYERS: We'll get you an answer on the legality of that. I'm sure we wouldn't do anything illegal. But let us look at that and get you an answer on that.

Q Thank you.

Q General, if you could explain a little bit more about this Iraqi special unit; how it will be used. Will it be used to gather intelligence, or will it be used as a strike force to go out and hunt and kill high-value targets? How will it be used?

GEN. MYERS: Well, my understanding is that it will be used along with coalition forces to fight the terrorism that we're seeing from the former regime elements, and perhaps others, foreign fighters, in that country. And because they are specially trained, and because they do know the territory and the language and the culture, we feel they'll be quite efficient at, mainly, operations, but also a huge piece of intelligence there too. They can help us interpret a lot of that intelligence.

Q Will they operate clandestinely?

GEN. MYERS: I'm not going to get into the details of that. I can't do that. That's starting to get into operational matters that we just aren't going to talk about.

Q How large? How many people involved?

GEN. MYERS: I'm not going to get into that. I can't get into it.

Q Mr. Secretary, back to Afghanistan. Is the United States engaging in contacts or negotiations with some of the followers of Hekmatyar to try to get them to either lay down their arms or join Karzai's government?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I was just there. The subject didn't come up. I would hope so, I mean, we're constantly trying to get more people to be with us than against us! And goodness knows, Hekmatyar is not with us. He's a person who has caused a whale of a lot of trouble in that part of the country. And to the extent we can get folks in that general neighborhood moved away from him, it would be a very good thing. But I'm not going to say that I know anything about it. I just don't happen to have gotten current on it lately.

Yes, sir?

Q Mr. Secretary, a follow-up on Afghanistan. I'm wondering if the issue of heroin came up in your trip there. In the past, and fairly recently, some Afghan officials and United Nations officials have warned that this year's bumper crop is increasing instability, regional violence, funding Islamic militants, perhaps a return of the Taliban, and certainly funding regional warlords. And I'm wondering if the issue came up and if you've had a chance to think through some of the issues of that.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Technically, I don't recall it coming up on this trip. It came up the day before I left, and it's come up since I've been back. And it's something we think through and worry about.

All crops in Afghanistan had a good year, and that's a wonderful thing from the standpoint of most crops. It's not a wonderful thing from the standpoint of poppies. And if the data is right, people are projecting and estimating that the crop this year will be sizeable and that it will represent a rather

major chunk of the illegal drugs that end up moving into Europe and Asia -- Russia and that part of the world.

Q Are U.S. forces taking a proactive role in helping to curb this? Are they doing anything about it? Or is it not a priority, given other --

SEC. RUMSFELD: It is certainly a matter of concern. It's a concern to the Karzai government. It's a concern to the coalition -- all members. The Brits have taken a lead on this issue. And certainly the United States has tried to be helpful.

Q Mr. Secretary --

SEC. RUMSFELD: We'll make this the last question.

Q Yes. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. The South Korean government has reported to send about 300 -- 3,000 noncombat troops to Iraq to help --

SEC. RUMSFELD: The South Korean government had done what? Announced it, you said?

Q Yes. Has reported --

SEC. RUMSFELD: Supported.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Reported.

Q Reported.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Reported.

Q Yes.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Sorry.

Q -- about 3,000 non-combat troops to Iraq to help the United States. Is that size of troops strong enough to wage independent military operation?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Oh, there's no question but that in -- any level of support like that is deeply appreciated and valued and important. And it takes political courage for countries to step forward. There are some 34 countries with forces in Iraq already. It takes personal courage for the individuals that go over there and serve, because it's a dangerous place. And each country has to think through and decide what -- how they can be the most helpful, whether it's combat troops or noncombat forces or humanitarian assistance or financial aid, all of which are appreciated by all of those countries, 34 countries, in the coalition.

Last question. (Light laughter.)

Q General Myers, can you give us some more information about Operation Avalanche -- basically, all we've heard about it is the mistaken killing of the nine children -- and also whether you have any more clarity on that, how that happened, after the vetting, and whether you're certain you killed Mullah Wazir?

GEN. MYERS: It was Mullah Wazir. It was the fellow we were after. He was connected to the recent killing of two ring road contractors. So we were after him. We thought he was -- we think he's also connected to other known terrorists operating in Afghanistan.

Q So you think we've killed him.

GEN. MYERS: No. My next statement is it's unclear whether or not he was the one that was killed in the strike. The commander of Joint Task Force 180, General Austin, has started an investigation into that to determine the facts and the circumstances. He's been to the village. Team members have been to the village. We're talking to the village leaders. We provided various things to the villagers to try to help with their grief. Nothing can do that, of course, when you lose nine children, but General Austin himself personally and other team members have been in that village working with the villagers to meet some of their needs after this incident. But we do not know at this time, and we'll have to -- it will have to be determined.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Thank you very much.

Q Could you -- (off mike)?

GEN. MYERS: I'll -- we'll get you a fact sheet on that, is probably the best way to handle it.

Q We will see you again before Christmas, gentlemen?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, I hope so.

Q Good. We do, too. Thank you.

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