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Presenter: Deputy Director for Regional Operations, Joint Staff, Brig. Gen. David Rodriguez and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Public Affairs, Lawrence DiRita

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Special Defense Department Briefing Operational Update

LAWRENCE DIRITA (Pentagon spokesman): I do want to just first of all welcome General Dave Rodriguez to the briefing room. He's the deputy director for Regional Operations in the Joint Staff, the J-3. Previous iterations of him have included such stars as Admiral Stufflebeam and others. We're very happy to have him engaged in this responsibility, which is to provide some updates from time to time, which we're happy to do today.

There have been some other briefings, I know, throughout the day at other agencies, and I think Ambassador Bremer spoke earlier. But we thought it would be useful to come down and just give a little bit of an assessment from this department.

And with that, I'll ask General Rodriguez to make a short statement, and we'll be happy to take some questions.

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Okay, thank you, Mr. DiRita, and good afternoon.

I'd like to extend my condolences to the family of the two service members killed earlier today after their vehicle hit an explosive device in Khalidiya, 80 miles west of Baghdad.

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While we continue to experience a great deal of success in securing Iraq for the Iraqi people, we will still have some difficult times ahead of us.

Just an update on the rotation plan: Over 40,000 of the troops scheduled to deploy have moved into theater; 35,000 of the troops redeploying have departed the theater. Over 60 commercial vessels are at sea today carrying more than 350,000 short tons of equipment to and from the theater. And over 90 military aircraft and 20 commercial aircraft are involved daily in the transfer of personnel and equipment.

And a summary of operations in Iraq over the last week: Coalition forces have conducted 10,700 patrols, 110 raids and 50 cordon and search operations. These operations have resulted in capturing 640 individuals.

And with that, we'll take your questions.

MR. DIRITA: Charlie?

Q Larry, we understand that the U.S. embassy in Haiti has asked for military assistance from SOUTHCOM to go down and just take a look at the situation, assess what's going on. Have they asked for it? Is SOUTHCOM going to send one? And what does that mean -- the size of the team, what it's going to do?

MR. DIRITA: First of all, let me just reiterate what's been said elsewhere. The secretary of State has spoken about this recently, and that's that there remains a lot of interest in resolving this matter politically. It's -- the secretary of State is working closely with other nations, other organizations in the region, to help advance a political settlement, a political solution that could at some point be offered as a proposal to the parties in Haiti. That is what everybody hopes can happen, and that's going to proceed and -- apace.

The -- there is always the importance of just doing the kind of prudent planning one does. And there are teams that are available at combatant commands, to -- at the request of ambassadors, to make assessments, to establish the security circumstances at the embassy and ensure that the ambassador's doing and has all he needs to ensure that kind of security.

It is my understanding that the ambassador in Haiti has asked for that kind of assistance. The Southern Command, as I said, has teams available to do this and is putting together a small team, three or four people, to go help make that assessment with the ambassador.

Q Do you know how -- when it would depart? And essentially what would this team do?

MR. DIRITA: Well, as I said, the ambassador understands what it is his responsibilities are to his embassy team, to the country team. He's always going to ensure -- generally speaking, ambassadors understand the responsibility that they have to the country team, to ensure that all the kind of prudent planning one would take in a circumstance such as this is being taken. And so he's asked for that kind of assistance. That's what this kind of team can do. It can kind of look around and ensure that the kinds of capabilities that the embassy can provide in its own security are available and that he's got what he needs, and that he's thinking through the problem as expansively as he needs to.

Q Meanwhile, does the Pentagon have contingency plans that it always has for a case like this, in case Americans get in danger in this situation, perhaps have --

MR. DIRITA: Well --

Q I mean, do you have contingency plans in case this comes about?

MR. DIRITA: Well, we don't discuss specific plans, and we're not going to discuss specific plans here, in particular, with respect to this situation. But certainly combatant commanders around the world routinely provide for that kind of contingency analysis. And again, I don't -- we don't have anything to comment with respect to this particular point.

What has happened thus far is what I've described. The ambassador, in exercising the responsibilities he has to his country team, has asked for some assistance in helping ensure that he's doing all he can, and that's what the Southern Command is going to try and provide some assistance for.

Q Larry, yesterday we were told by a military spokesman in Iraq that seven people rounded up in a raid were suspected of possibly having al Qaeda links. Today Ambassador Bremer said that at this point it looks like they are simply Iraqi insurgents and not connected to al Qaeda. Can you give us -- either one of you -- can you give us some sort of indication of how many people you have found in Iraq, who you do believe have links to al Qaeda? Is it a handful? Are there any? Is it a small number? Can you give us anything on that?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: There's not an exact number. And there's -- also the tenuousness of making those decisions are very, very difficult. So there's no actual al Qaeda members that we say are in the -- you know -- inner circle of al Qaeda in detention over there.

Q Because it's often said that people -- particularly when they're first rounded up, it's believed that they might have links to al Qaeda. It's often the case it turns out later we're told it's not. I'm just wondering if there are any -- have there been anybody in which they've had some sort of confirmed link to al Qaeda after further review?

MR. DIRITA: I can't speak to whether there's been any confirmed linkages. What has been seen are tactics that are consistent with the kinds of tactics al Qaeda has used around the world, these sensational bombings targeted -- indiscriminately targeted at civilians for the purposes of terrorizing, which is what terrorists do.

We know that there's been the discovery of what is believed to be a letter from Mr. Zarqawi that describes his interest or al Qaeda's interest in what can be done to further -- to possibly destabilize the various elements inside of Iraq, or contribute to that.

So there's an awful lot of circumstantial indications that al Qaeda is quite interested in Iraq, but I'm not prepared to say --

Q Speaking of that letter, that's been widely quoted, and again was quoted today by Ambassador Bremer. Some have suggested that the letter sounds almost too good, that it may be a forgery. Have you made any additional effort to authenticate it? And do you have any reason to believe that it might not be authentic?

MR. DIRITA: I don't have any independent assessment. What I understand is that the people who do make those kinds of assessments believe it to be accurate. And I'm not aware that there have been any follow-on assessments to the original assessment. But the circumstances in which it was obtained and the assessments that have been made by the people responsible for those assessments suggest that it is what it purports to be.

Q Isn't it true that Hassan Ghul was a top al Qaeda operative who was captured inside Iraq? And is that the only al Qaeda operative that you can name, by name, as being al Qaeda in Iraq?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Yes, he was captured in Iraq. And he was the -- is the closest one to the inner circle of the al Qaeda organization that we have identified at this point in time.

Q But as far as others, there's just no other card-carrying al Qaeda that you can name?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: That's correct. And we think --

MR. DIRITA: And that's the point, is what does card-carrying mean? And these people carry multiple identifications. They have multiple aliases. It's a difficult thing to establish with certainty. And what you do is you make your best assessment, and the assessment includes the kinds of things I've discussed.

We're seeing tactics that are very similar to tactics al Qaeda has employed elsewhere. We're seeing people who are clearly al Qaeda with an interest, an expressed interest in Iraq. And those kinds

of evaluations are just made all the time, and they are frankly made much better from the theater, and there's a lot of ongoing work to ensure that those assessments are refined as they can be.

Bob?

Q Larry, I wanted to ask you about the attack on the police station in Fallujah on Saturday. Can you bring us up to date on what you have learned at this point about whether it was an inside job, so to speak; as to whether information was provided from Iraqis, either -- and what you have learned from the mayor, who has been in detention?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Right. That occurred, obviously, early morning hours on Saturday. It was a pretty well-synchronized attack. It occurred in a very, very short period of time, about 15 minutes, beginning with cutting the communication links around the police station.

Q Is that phone lines?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Yes. Yes.

Q Okay.

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: And then they occurred at both -- simultaneously at two locations about a mile away. One was the Civil Defense Corps headquarters and one was the police headquarters. Obviously, we had some significant losses at the police headquarters. The Civil Defense Corps personnel (one) acquitted themselves very well. And then retook the police station, but were unable to respond inside the time that was required, with the speed which the operation occurred and the inability to communicate rapidly out of the police station, because of the lines being cut.

The QRF was activated, the Civil Defense Corps -- the American QRF was activated, Quick Response Force, and responded, and the Civil Defense Corps commander there requested only ammunition and arms because he wanted to take care of the situation himself, which he did. And like I said, it was just the speed that was unable to get the response there from the Civil Defense Corps as fast as we wanted to.

Q You described what happened, but can you tell us what you've learned since about who is responsible for --

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Yes, the -- right now, the -- we had -- one of the KIAs was confirmed as a former Iraqi major, and we have continued to look at that. We have detained the mayor, and we have -- several other people have been detained. But we have not gotten to the bottom of that, and we continue to do the interrogations and search for the answers on who was actually behind it.

Q Where was the major from? Mukhabarat or the --

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: I don't know the location of where the major was from.

MR. DIRITA: The organization.

Q (Inaudible) -- was he with -- from --

Q Iraqi army, or --

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: He was from the Iraqi army, I'm sorry.

Q Republican Guard or regular army?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: It was just the regular army.

Q From where?

Q Is there some reason to suspect that the mayor might be involved in --

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: That was why he was detained, to interrogate him -- or to question him and find out if there was anything behind that. He was an interim mayor who was about to be replaced anyhow, and he's actually been replaced since then. And the interrogations continue, so we continue to detain him and several other people. Two of the personnel detained were also from the Civil Defense Corps organization, so they were obviously vetted and were able to slip through somehow. So at least they have been detained, and we're continuing to question them also.

Q What do you mean, slip through?

Q Can you tell us why the mayor is under --

Q What do you mean, slip through? I mean, in other words, they were -- had been confirmed as having provided information?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: They have not been confirmed, but they have been suspected of having information. They have been detained, so that's what we'll continue to work on and try to get to the bottom of it.

Q Why is the mayor suspected of this? What link?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: The mayor was suspected of that just based on the situation, and the people on the ground determined it. They thought he might have something to do with it, so they detained him, and like I said we're interrogating him and trying to get to the bottom of it.

MR. DIRITA: John?

Q Is this indicating a kind of pattern of the insurgents trying infiltrate these security organizations and other official positions in order to combat the occupation?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: We have not had several occasions for this to happen that we've been able to establish a pattern or anything, but we continue to watch that. Obviously, one of the big challenges as we vet these people and bring them back is a critical step in the process and we continue to do that the best we can, but we're not sure we'll ever get that to the perfect level.

MR. DIRITA: Well, we know we won't, and in fact we have released people once we've -- in addition to this situation, where we may have determined that these guys were clearly bad guys. There have been other situations -- not related to specific activities, but you bring these people in, you evaluate them, and then the best vetting processes are the other Iraqis who say, hey, you didn't know this, but here's what we know about that guy. And we've already, probably in all of the security forces, had to let some of these guys go, and in some cases apprehend some of them.

So it's -- we're working very hard to vet these guys and to get Iraqis more involved in their own security, and that's moving forward quite well. But we know that we're going to pick up some of the wrong people, and we'll vet them and deal with them if that happens.

Barbara?

Q General Rodriguez, to follow up on a couple of points, do you have any information yet that this attack on the police station was in any way related to the attack on General Abizaid's party?

And my second question, in the same general realm. Given the fact that there have been so many attacks against Iraqi targets, if you will, is the Pentagon and the military rethinking what General Dempsey has described as the plan to reduce the footprint, the visible footprint of the military, to reduce the number of points at which, you know, there are security -- visible security checkpoints and withdraw the military a little bit outside of the cities, since Ambassador Bremer says he doesn't feel the Iraqis are going to be able to fully look after their own security by June 30th?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: On the first point, there's been no connection confirmed between the attack on General Abizaid and General Swannack, which happened two days prior.

And on the second part, those decisions get made by people on the ground based on the conditions that exist at that particular point in time and how far we can pull out the American forces and let the Iraqis assume their rightful place securing their own country. And in each one of these situations, just like this one, we'll do a review of the operation and see what we could have done better to make sure that this does not occur in the future. But like I've said, it's condition-dependent, and we'll just make those decisions as they go on the ground.

MR. DIRITA: Let me also just make -- add a little bit to the final point that you made, Barbara, and that is Ambassador Bremer suggested -- perhaps I didn't see all of his press availability -- that something won't be completed by June 30th, the Iraqis being responsible for their own security. That's one of many things that won't be completed by June 30th. There will be -- June 30th is a date, an objective for the transition to sovereignty that's been established, and it has been well discussed and it's not really -- I'm not going to comment on that.

But all of the other -- a lot of the other activities that are going on in Iraq now with coalition and U.S. assistance will continue. It will continue perhaps as a component of the embassy, it will continue perhaps as a component of some other organization that has yet to be determined. But we're going to stay very involved in, obviously, the security aspects of Iraq.

Q And --

MR. DIRITA: Hold one for one second.

We'll certainly stay involved in the essential services. And there's still going to be the expenditure of U.S. taxpayer dollars through the Project Management Office.

So there's no great divide after which something significant happens, beyond the transfer of sovereignty. And that's being worked out by the people with responsibility.

Q And I have a question about that, because Ambassador Bremer said today that with the transfer of sovereignty, technically the coalition military occupation of Iraq ends and a sovereign Iraqi entity takes over.

What happens if that sovereign Iraqi entity, after June 30th, asks the U.S. military to leave the country?

MR. DIRITA: Well, I think that there's a general -- certainly -- let me just speak to the issue broadly. The Secretary of Defense has said many times that the United States forces stay -- we don't wish to have forces where they're not welcome.

It is everybody's fairly confident belief that the -- certainly the members -- the current members of the Governing Council, but generally speaking, the political -- those in Iraq who wish to see this transition to democracy continue and to succeed, understand the important role that the coalition forces will continue to play for some time. And the terms on how that role will be discharged, those responsibilities will be discharged, are being developed.

But it's -- I don't want to respond to a hypothetical question -- What if? I can only say that I think there's a fairly comfortable understanding that the coalition has a lot to offer with respect to continued security in Iraq, that people in Iraq understand that, want the coalition to continue to be involved in security in some way. And we -- as the president said, we'll stay in Iraq as long as necessary, and no longer.

Jim?

Q Just to follow on, on that, is there a status of forces agreement being negotiated? And with whom are we negotiating that sort of an agreement for the American troops staying on after June 30th?

MR. DIRITA: There will be an understanding as to what the coalition forces are going to need to be able to do to discharge the responsibilities we'll have as a security partner for the government that's established post-June 30th. I wouldn't refer to the status of forces agreement necessarily, but that kind of an understanding that the coalition will need to do -- will need to take actions and be involved in ways and in areas of the country as necessary to -- as I said, to be a partner in the security aspects of Iraq. So yeah.

Did -- anything you need to add to --

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: No. There will be something that does that type of function, whether it's actually a SOFA agreement or not. But the agreement will work out those same type of protections and rights that we want for American servicemen.

Anne (sp)?

Q General Myers told some of us this morning that the U.S. response to the Fallujah attack wasn't quite what they would have wanted. Could you describe what some of those problems you see -- what some of those problems are and maybe how they're going to get fixed?

And then, just closing a loop on the al Qaeda thing, maybe you can tell us how many foreign fighters you've found. Even if you don't know their affiliation, you do know if they are or are not Iraqi, I would presume.

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: The response from the American QRF -- in this case, you know, obviously what we wanted it to do was make a difference. But because of the timeframe that it occurred and the speed with which it occurred, plus, like I said, the Civil Defense Corps' position on what it wanted to do, which -- it acquitted itself very well and accomplished its mission. So -- but anyhow, we'll take assessment of everything that went on during that operation and make the adjustments to make sure something like that doesn't happen in the future.

Q And on the foreign fighter numbers?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: On the foreign fighter numbers? I don't have those, but we do have a number of those, and we'll get with you afterwards and give you that number. Okay?

MR. DIRITA: We can get you our best assessment.

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Right.

MR. DIRITA: Nick?

Q Larry, the British government has announced that five of the Britons detained in Guantanamo Bay will be leaving in the next few weeks. Can you say what it is that finally unlocked this after what seems like months of negotiations and why it is only five, rather than the nine, which I -- the full nine, which I think the British government was pitching for? And what's going to happen to the four remaining?

MR. DIRITA: Well, the -- first of all, let me just zoom out a bit. The -- we've said that we're engaged with quite a number of countries on developing agreements to transfer detainees out of Guantanamo. The Secretary spoke last Friday quite clearly that we don't wish to detain people in Guantanamo if we don't need to detain them. And we are working with a large number of countries on citizens or nationals from their countries as to what kind of arrangements can be made for us to return them.

In the case of the British, there was an agreement established for the repatriation of a handful of the detainees that are in Guantanamo. I don't have details on the specifics, nor would it be our place to comment on the specific -- the terms of that agreement. I would defer to the British government to talk about it -- how they choose to talk about it -- how it chooses to talk about it.

And each of these cases is evaluated on its own merits. Each of the individuals under review for return to another country is evaluated on its own merits. And to try and evaluate why X number instead of X plus Y was returned is just sort of an unnecessary exercise. These five were determined to be

appropriate for transfer. The British government has accepted that responsibility, and we're going to transfer them at some point soon.

Q Are these guys being essentially freed or turned over to them for incarceration and further questioning for possible --

MR. DIRITA: I did not see the British statement. We are turning them over to the British government, and the British government is going to take further actions from here. And again, I would just refer you to the British government.

Rick?

Q General, the other day, General Barno did a briefing with us from Afghanistan and he talked about the Pakistani military -- (inaudible) -- the tribal areas in the northwest frontier province. And I was just wondering, are there any U.S. troops operating in those areas with the Pakistani military?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: No, there are not.

Q Never have been?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: No. No.

Q Could you comment on a Washington Times report that Special Operations folks might be stationed in embassies and used for surveillance work? That would seem to be a departure --

Q The Green Berets.

Q The Green Berets. That would be a departure from, you know, their usual modus of working in uniform, or at least in the uniform -- (inaudible) -- countries.

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: No, we're not going to comment on the Special Forces training or operations that are occurring. But they are a huge part of the global war on terrorism, and we continue to look at the way they operate and how they can best contribute to the global war on terrorism.

MR. DIRITA: But we have nothing to comment on any particular reports today.

Q But if Green Berets were turned into, quote, "spies," unquote, and they were out of uniform, isn't there -- I mean, that's against military rules --

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: It is not -- they would not be out of uniform, that's correct.

Q So you would not have Green Berets or anybody else out of uniform spying on --

MR. DIRITA: Let me pull back on that question. Would we do something that's contrary to military regulations and the law, is your question. And the answer is no.

Q Which means -- which means --

MR. DIRITA: It means what I just said.

Q -- therefore, you couldn't choose people in the military, take them out of uniform and use them as spies or anything? I mean, you couldn't do that, right, is what you're saying?

MR. DIRITA: I have no comment on any particular questions about Special Forces because we don't talk about these Special Forces.

Q So you're saying the rules prohibit it, but you're not saying whether or not you'll break the rules and do that? (Laughter.)

MR. DIRITA: Well, no, I specifically said we will not break rules --

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: We're not going to break the rules.

MR. DIRITA: -- and we're not going to break the law.

Q You're not going to comment any further.

MR. DIRITA: (Laughs.) Thank you. As a matter of fact, we aren't going to comment any further. (Laughter.)

Q In the attack on the police station, can you explain what -- why the QRF did not respond in a timely way? Was it because communications were cut? And if that's the case, I mean, why weren't they able to communicate?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: It was -- they said that there were a couple factors that influenced that reason. One, of course, is the speed with which it happened. It was about 15 minutes. The second thing is there were two operations that occurred simultaneously. One was at the Civil Defense Corps headquarters and the police headquarters. The challenge with the police headquarters communicating outside was done by, like I said, cutting the phone lines, and that's what they initially did. And in the chaos that ensued, they were unable to get the communications out to everybody as fast as they could.

The Civil Defense Corps responded the quickest, which was the closest, which they were within about five minutes away. And they took up the fight and retook the police station at that time.

The American QRF, okay, which was about five to 10 minutes away, responded immediately to the Civil Defense Corps thing, who had obviously the better communications during that 15-minute time period, at which point in time the Civil Defense Corps commander said, we can handle it; the only assistance we need right now is ammunition and arms. And we provided that to them and supported the Civil Defense Corps in retaking the police station.

Q Did the police not have radio communications with the QRF?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: The police station itself had communications with phone lines with the CDC, I know that. I do not know about the radio communications at this point in time.

Q What does a QRF consist of?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: The Quick Reaction Force consists of -- it's an array of things to include anything from close air support, helicopters, down to people on the ground in both armored vehicles as well as humvees. And they tailor it to the response, and it's always ready to go.

MR. DIRITA: Yes, sir?

Q (Off mike) -- can you tell us what the status now is of Ansar al-Islam, how many you think there are there, what level of activity they are engaged in?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: No, not exactly. I'd have to get back with you on that and everything, but it's -- there are some indications that there is some activity from Ansar al-Islam, but to comment on the level and everything would not be appropriate at this point in time.

Q Have you made any changes to the number of Navy or Coast Guard ships that may have been deployed around Haiti now?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: No, we have not.

MR. DIRITA: I know we just -- I mean, on the question of Haiti, we have said what we can say, what we're prepared to say. I mean, there's the political solution that's being developed, a proposal being developed, and I've made a comment with respect to what the Ambassador's request is.

Q Can you comment directly on that assessment that you've talked about?

MR. DIRITA: I'll try.

Q With -- thank you. With -- (laughs) --

MR. DIRITA: I hardly believe it needs further clarification. (Chuckles.)

Q Well, just part of the question. Would they -- are they restricted to looking at embassy security for the embassy team, or will they -- if the ambassador asks, or will they look at other broader security issues for Americans living in Haiti?

MR. DIRITA: I don't know their charter. What they've been asked to do is what I've described. The ambassador has responsibilities to the country team in that country.

Q Okay, I'm not sure I actually understood your descriptions; that's why I asked.

MR. DIRITA: I see.

Q Does that description cover only embassy security or does it cover the American presence, including American citizens in Haiti?

MR. DIRITA: Do you have a better sense of it than I've given?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: It supports the request of the American embassy, but it is focused on the Americans in the embassy and the protection of the official Americans.

Q Right. So they are not at the point of looking at security for Americans living there?

MR. DIRITA: I don't think, Barbara, we're able to go any further than what we've just described. I mean, it serves no useful purpose to get speculative about this. What they've been asked to do is what we've described. The ambassador is trying to conduct his prudent assessment of how capable is he to take care of the people for whom he's responsible for in that country team, and he's doing that, and this team will help do that.

In the back.

Q (Off mike) -- lay the groundwork for the possible evacuation of the embassy, or U.S. personnel that are living --

MR. DIRITA: The team is to do what I've described.

Q Can you give us any update on whether or not a schedule or some draft of legal proceedings have been put together for Saddam Hussein and the 50 or so-odd Iraqis in the deck of cards?

MR. DIRITA: I don't have a good -- there's a lot of work being done in Iraq on how to start developing the case. The Iraqis have expressed a desire to be very involved in that and they are. But I would just refer you to the Coalition Provisional Authority, and they can probably give you a lot better refinement as to how that work's being done.

Q So there's no target date a year from now, two years from now, to have this done?

MR. DIRITA: Not that I'm aware of. Not that I'm aware of.

Q (Do you have verification ?) on something, Larry?

MR. DIRITA: (Laughs.) I doubt it.

Q On the Brits remaining in Gitmo, five are being released, soon; four remain.

MR. DIRITA: Well, I don't know that. There may be others. I just don't know the total number of British in Guantanamo.

Q The published number is nine, but maybe there are more. The ones who remain --

MR. DIRITA: There was a report that nine were being considered. I'm not sure that's the same as saying that there are nine at Guantanamo. I just simply don't know.

Q Of the remaining, is it true that one of them has been identified to possibly go before a military commission? One or two?

MR. DIRITA: Here's what I do know. The president made a determination on six individuals last July, two of whom were British. And I'm not -- I don't know enough of the people in the population down there to be able to crosswalk that against who's been under consideration for release. I would again just refer you to the British statement today, which I have not seen.

Q Well, two of the -- those two are not among the five being released. Can you --

MR. DIRITA: Are you asking me or telling me?

Q I'm asking you.

MR. DIRITA: That's correct.

Q So you can't characterize the other people that don't fall under the two who have been identified?

MR. DIRITA: No, all I've said is that there were six people that the president made a reason to believe -- determination with respect to military commissions. Two of those were British citizens. But beyond that, I can't connect them to the number that have been under --

Q You understand that I'm trying to figure out why the others are not being released.

MR. DIRITA: Yeah. No, I -- you're -- appreciate that. Yeah. As I said, each situation is evaluated on its own merits, each case. And in this particular case, five individuals were determined to be, you know, eligible for repatriation to Great Britain, and that's what we're going to do. I just can't speak to the details on who else may have been under consideration.

Q How soon would they be released?

MR. DIRITA: I think in the immediate period of time ahead. I just don't -- I don't know how long it will take to work through the sort of transportation modalities and all that stuff. The agreement's been made, is what I understand.

Q Just a housekeeping point, if you're about to wind up. Since the Secretary is not briefing as often as he did before -- he was briefing at least once a week before, and sometimes more often -- could we have these more often, perhaps on a regular basis, once or twice a week --

MR. DIRITA: As you know, we work very hard to provide the information that's necessary for rapid disclosure of necessary --

Q No, but if you could, it's good to address issues other than Iraq that come up.

MR. DIRITA: Sure.

Q So if we could have --

MR. DIRITA: We'll try to maintain our typically high standard of information.

Q (Off mike.)

Q There was a time when there were actually regular Pentagon briefings every Tuesday, Thursday -- (cross talk) --

MR. DIRITA: Is that right?

Q Yeah. (Cross talk.) It was back before the turn of the century.

MR. DIRITA: (Laughs.) Yeah. That was sort of a last century model. (Cross talk, laughter.)

We're transforming this place. We're transforming this place. (Laughter, cross talk.)

Thank you very much.

Q Come back.

Q Thank you.

MR. DIRITA: I'm here every day, working for you.

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