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Briefing on Civilian Stabilization Initiative

Ambassador John E. Herbst, Coordinator for the Office of Reconstruction and Stabilization

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MR. GALLEGOS: Good afternoon. Thank you all for coming today. We have the Coordinator for the Office of Reconstruction and Stabilization Ambassador John E. Herbst. He'll be giving us a briefing on our Civilian Stabilization Initiative.

Ambassador Herbst.

AMBASSADOR HERBST: Thank you. And thank you for coming this afternoon. The Civilian Stabilization Initiative is a direct response to the experiences we've had in Afghanistan and especially Iraq. As I think you may know, S/CRS, the office I run, was created in June of 2004 and it was created to do two things, which we are going to do through the Civilian Stabilization Initiative. First, it's designed to organize the U.S. Government, all civilian agencies, to bring the assets of those agencies to bear on a stabilization crisis overseas where American interests are at stake. Two, it's to make sure that we've got the civilians we need with the right skills, training and equipment to deploy to those crisis spots, and the Civilian Stabilization Initiative does both.

Regarding the first job of organizing the U.S. Government, we have created something called the Interagency Management System, which would be used in a stabilization crisis. This system, I won't describe in great detail unless you have questions about it, ensures that all civilian agencies which have some role to play, participate in formulating a plan of operations. They have a single plan of operations taking into account all civilian assets, plus if there's a military component that harmonizes with military plans. And it oversees the implementation of a single plan. So you have one body in charge of civilian operations. The main part of the Civilian Stabilization Initiative, though, deals with that second objective -- making sure we've got the civilians we need to deploy to these places.

The CSI creates-- would create three separate pools of trained and equipped civilians. The inner core of this initiative is something we call the Active Response Corps. These would be people who are -- have the following sets of skills. They have various

engineering skills. They have – they are policemen, judges, lawyers, corrections officials and those – those involved in the rule of law. They have – they are economists, public administrators, public health officials, agronomists, city planners -- you get the picture -- people who can oversee or actually provide basic government services in a pinch.

The Active Response Corps will – can be – we want to create – the Civilian Stabilization Initiative talks about having 250 of them. About 40 percent would be in the State Department, about 40 percent would be in USAID and the remaining 20 percent would be in Justice, Treasury, Agriculture, Commerce, et cetera. They would be trained and equipped for several months. They'd be trained to operate as teams. They'd be trained to operate alongside the military, if necessary. And once trained and equipped, they'd be able to deploy within three days, even two days, of a decision. They will be trained to go in with our military at the same time, instead of our military to prevent a situation from spiraling out of control, or after our military. They'll be trained to go with other countries, with international organizations, with regional organizations.

We believe that we can deploy 80 percent of these people continuously. So if we have an Active Response Corps of 250 people, we can deploy 200 all the time. The second part of this capability is called the Standby Response Corps. These are folks in the same civilian agencies as the Active Response Corps. They have the same sets of skills. They will have, however, a full-time day job. Their normal job is not to deploy to countries in crisis. They will train for several weeks a year. We believe that we could deploy them within 45 to 60 days of a decision. The Standby Response Corps will be a core of 2,000 people. Because they have full-time day jobs, we believe we could only deploy a minimum 10 percent. We are confident we can get 10 percent. We might be able to deploy as many as 25 percent at any one time. So we're talking about 200 people out of – if you're talking about 10 percent of 2,000; 500 people, if you're talking about 25 percent, who could deploy for a crisis continuously.

The third part of this civilian Response capability is what we call the Civilian Reserve Corps. You may know that President Bush referred to this in his 2007 State of the Union speech. The Civilian Reserve Corps we'd like to build would be for 2,000 people. These will be people with the same sets of skills as the Standby the Active Response Corps. However, they would be coming from civilian life, from the private sector, from state and local government. They would sign up for this Civilian Reserve Corps for a period of four years. It's a little bit like the military reserve system. They would, like our Standby Response Corps members, train for several weeks a year. They would have a commitment to deploy for up to one year during this four-year period. The capability that I've described, the combination of the Active Response Corps, the Standby Response Corps and the Civilian Reserve Corps would give us the ability to deploy within two months of a crisis—upon having a decision— anywhere from 900 to 1,200 trained and equipped civilians. They would man the interagency system. They would ensure a single command and control structure for civilian operations in a stabilization crisis. This would enable us to, you might say, avoid some of the problems we've encountered in the field in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Thank you, happy to take any questions.

QUESTION: Did you say how many people were in what you called, I think, the Active Response Corps?

AMBASSADOR HERBST: Yes, 250. That's how many we would like to put into this Active Response Corps.

QUESTION: Right. And that's also something that you're working on now. It does not actually exist yet.

AMBASSADOR HERBST: We have a tiny, tiny Active Response Corps in my office. We have 11 people in it and those folks have seen some very interesting service. They have been in Darfur, in Chad, in Sri Lanka, in Nepal, in Haiti, in Lebanon, in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Yes.

QUESTION: Can you talk a little bit about the criteria by which the Administration would send in teams like this. I mean, does the U. S. have to be involved in the conflict, does the UN have to give a mandate? I mean, how do you decide where to send it, and if it's not like a kind of, you know, large crisis on the, you know, the level of Iraq or Afghanistan, is there a danger that you're going to stretch this corps too thin for when it's really needed in a bigger conflict? And how many conflicts do you anticipate at one time being able to manage?

AMBASSADOR HERBST: Well, there are a variety of questions there. I'll try and take them one by one. The most important thing to point out is this capability was created because we realized we had a substantial national security need for dealing with large crises we've encountered in Iraq and Afghanistan. So with this capability it would enable us to put civilians with the right skills managing civilian programs in such contingencies instead of having the military do that. This, we believe, would save both money and lives. However, if you create this capability, it could be used for something short of that, something far short of that, in fact.

We have considered the question you asked: Well, what about using it for something rather small; What would that mean for that capability to be available in a large crisis? We have the ability to foresee, not entirely, but partly what the future brings -- so where you have countries in crisis, where our interests are at stake. So it's quite possible to imagine -- you decide you have a certain interest in country A and you will send 20 or 30 people from this Active Response Corps to help shore up whatever the problem is in that country, while still maintaining the bulk of your force for a large potential operation that might come up -- along in the coming months. And you could also have the ability to pull people out of a less -- a lower priority operation for a higher priority one. This capability is meant to provide maximum flexibility, to operate either alone, with our allies, with international organizations, with regional organizations.

QUESTION: How do you handle the coordinate -- I missed that if you said it, the -- I mean, the United States isn't the only country that responds to crises. Well, it may be when it's considered to be responsible for them if -- by other countries. But in, let's say, a tsunami situation or something like that when, you know, every country in the world that has the means is sending people down there. Who do these people -- who would these people report to when they're on the ground?

AMBASSADOR HERBST: Something I should have made clear at the beginning, which your question raises, this capability is not designed to deal with natural disasters. We have a system that functions very well which handles that, OFDA. The DART teams at AID are wonderful things and they manage natural disasters. But your coordination question is still applicable to a stabilization crisis. The problem of failed states, besides being an enormous national security problem for the next couple of generations at a minimum, is precisely because of that, recognized as a major problem, not just by the United States.

S/CRS, which was created in June of '04, is one of about a dozen offices which have come into existence around the world in that period. There's a very large -- in fact, we have a large counterpart office in Canada called START, which has a budget this current fiscal year of over \$260 million. Great Britain has an office like ours. The Netherlands has an office like ours, Germany, many of the Scandinavian countries. The UN created the Peacebuilding Commission just a few years ago and just two years ago, created the Peacebuilding Support Office. The EU has a substantial capability in an office in this field. The Australians have a very strong capability.

So many countries understand that this is a key national security challenge which is going to remain key for a long time. A point of fact: our office is in good contact and steady contact with almost all of them on a regular basis and all of them on some basis. When you had the crisis in Lebanon in the summer of '06, a crisis in which we played only a very, very modest role, we were in touch with our counterparts in Britain and Canada from day one. When we wound up sending someone out to our embassy in Beirut, that person was immediately in touch with various international colleagues to ensure that we know what each other is doing.

The question of stabilization operations has been taken up by the G8 at the St. Petersburg summit in '06. We talked there as well about coordination. Coordination internationally is a key part of this, you might say, issue area and we're very much aware of that.

QUESTION: So who do they – when they get onto the ground, who do they report to? Only Americans or do they --

AMBASSADOR HERBST: Our people will report to us. But a point of fact, all we have right now is a very small capability.

QUESTION: Right.

AMBASSADOR HERBST: What we want to create is a relatively large one. And they – our people on the ground will be reporting to us, but we can envisage situations where, for example, you might have a UN-led operation, you might have UN peacekeepers in an American decision to provide some support for that on the civilian side. And our people would be operating in conjunction with them, but they would still be reporting back to Washington.

QUESTION: You mentioned to avoid repeating some of the same mistakes in Iraq and Afghanistan. Are you thinking of the looting that these response corps could help with the police situation?

AMBASSADOR HERBST: I'm referring mainly to ensuring a comprehensive plan of operations which is implemented comprehensively, ensuring that all parts of the U.S. Government are fulfilling the same plan; you don't have different parts of the U.S. Government with different agencies on the ground, in question, pursuing different things. Everyone aware of what everyone's doing and doing it in tandem, no duplication, no operation across purposes.

QUESTION: Just forgive me if this was in the President's speech that you referred to before, but the Civilian Reserve Corps, I mean, how do you convince the Scranton city planner or the – you know, I don't know, the sewage engineer from Philadelphia to join this? Do they get paid? They have to go – they could be away for up to a year?

AMBASSADOR HERBST: We would be taking – people who join the Civilian Reserve Corps would become temporary federal employees, so they receive a U.S. Government salary and the benefits that U.S. Government employees receive for the period that they're in service. There is a great deal of civic mindedness in this country, which I believe would be easy to tap into to create this corps.

When the President made his – gave the State of the Union a year ago and had a brief reference to us, we were deluged with phone calls, e-mails, faxes. And in fact, believe me, our office is not the easiest office to find in the State Department and people wanted to sign up. I go out and talk to folks all the time and people are enthusiastic. I have friends who wanted to join the Peace Corps – say yeah, they did very well in life; they're talking about joining the Peace Corps, but when they hear what we want to do, they say no, we want to sign up with you because you're the Peace Corps with a difference -- your ability to go out and transform things. So I think we will find a lot of Americans who are interested in this and willing to sign up.

QUESTION: But are you going to be actively recruiting people?

AMBASSADOR HERBST: Oh, we'll have to recruit people, yes.

QUESTION: Even though you have hundreds of people calling in? I'm just curious as to how it works and when do you expect these – this large 2,000 strong corps to be set up?

AMBASSADOR HERBST: Right now, we need to have the appropriations and authorization to do this. Once we have that, we will start. We've already done a great deal of planning so that once we have the authorization appropriation, we could sprint. But we've talked to our colleagues in the military, we've talked to people who have helped recruitment drives before, and there's a way forward.

QUESTION: How much money are you talking about to set this up?

AMBASSADOR HERBST: The budget request for Fiscal '09 asks for \$248.6 million to create this capability.

QUESTION: I'm sorry, two hundred and?

AMBASSADOR HERBST: \$248.6 million.

QUESTION: So you have the 2,000 kind of corps and then out of that, 250 are like, rapid response people?

AMBASSADOR HERBST: There are three separate elements.

QUESTION: Sorry, okay.

AMBASSADOR HERBST: There's 250 Active Response Corps; those are the guys and gals who can go out in 48, 72 hours all upon a decision. Backing them up also within the federal agencies, like the Active Response Corps, is the Standby Response Corps. There are 2,000 of those folks. As I already mentioned, we feel, because they have full-time day jobs, we could deploy at least 10 percent of them if we needed to, maximum of 25 percent. And then the third element is the Civilian Reserve Corps, 2,000 from whom at any given time, we could deploy 25 percent.

QUESTION: The money that you'd need, that's just for the first year to create it and I wonder what it's going to cost to keep it going?

AMBASSADOR HERBST: How much would it cost to keep it going?

QUESTION: Yeah.

AMBASSADOR HERBST: Right, 248 million just to create these capabilities. The – if we created it and did not use it our first year, it would be 131 million to sustain.

QUESTION: So that's what you think – and then when you're really up to full speed and this is actually – you know, you've got all your people and it's working, what's your estimate of how much that's going to cost every year?

AMBASSADOR HERBST: Well, that really depends upon its usage. I mean, point of fact, creating this capability or maintaining it is not a very heavy expense compared to our overall budget, State – the U.S. Government budget, especially the military budget. But using it could require some money. Deployment is going to be expensive, but how much deployment costs depends upon the circumstances.

For example, if you deployed this group in a benign environment to do preventive work so a country does not completely fall apart, so we don't have to send in our troops, that might not cost that much because the security part of that is not going to be very high.

If you deploy this force in a hostile environment and you have heavy security costs, then the deployment costs are going to go up substantially.

QUESTION: But I'm sure they'll be asking you on Capitol Hill, you know, what you think this is going to cost long-term. I know it's --

AMBASSADOR HERBST: But that's like --

QUESTION: -- difficult, but you have to --

AMBASSADOR HERBST: Well, no, we --

QUESTION: -- talk about some parameters.

AMBASSADOR HERBST: The only thing I can say to that is it depends upon the operation. If we're going to be deploying, say, 800 or a thousand people a year in a non-secure environment, then the cost could be hundreds of millions of dollars. If we're going to be pouring even, say, 250 in a relatively secure environment, then the cost will be tens of millions of dollars.

But the thing to keep in mind is, right now you have in some ongoing operations military doing civilian jobs, so you're really not talking about additional costs to the United States Government, to the American taxpayer, you're talking about costs going into a different pocket and probably an overall reduction of costs because this will be a more efficient system.

QUESTION: Did you say that after the initial money -- 248 -- if -- the next year if it wasn't used at all, if there were no crises to respond to, it would cost 131 million just to keep --

AMBASSADOR HERBST: Well, put another way, if you were not drawing down equipment if, for example --

QUESTION: In other words, if there wasn't anyone going anywhere, if it wasn't needed, it would still cost \$131 million just for the infrastructure of having it in place?

AMBASSADOR HERBST: Right.

QUESTION: Yeah.

AMBASSADOR HERBST: But I am absolutely confident that if we create this, the Active Response Corps is going to be extremely active. Then the maintenance cost would be higher than 131, but it depends on where they're used --

QUESTION: Right.

AMBASSADOR HERBST: -- as to how expensive. Because again, if you're using up equipment substantially and you have security costs then the price is going to be much higher.

QUESTION: And what -- who do you envision protects these people, contractors?

AMBASSADOR HERBST: Contractors will be protecting them when there are no military, American military or foreign military on the ground.

QUESTION: In other words, everywhere outside Iraq and Afghanistan?

AMBASSADOR HERBST: Well, it depends. A point of fact, I mentioned I've had my tiny Active Response Corps out in various places, including Darfur. In Darfur they were basically under the protection of the African Union forces.

QUESTION: Okay.

QUESTION: To talk about the 2,000 of the Reserve within the agencies that will be kind of ready -- the Reserve Civil Corps, the 2,000 from within the agencies, are they going to just be kind of waiting around ready to go? Are they also, in addition to the civilians workers, have day jobs at the State Department, at the Treasury and --

AMBASSADOR HERBST: The Standby Response Corps have day jobs --

QUESTION: In the U.S. Government.

AMBASSADOR HERBST: In the federal government, that's right.

QUESTION: Okay.

QUESTION: I'm still confused by how they get there, whether they're invited in. I mean, in Darfur how did they -- how did you small group get to Darfur? What happens in a situation like that?

AMBASSADOR HERBST: Oh, we saw a need there to put people -- the U.S. Government saw a need there to put people on the ground and we sent them and we went through the normal procedures for putting diplomats in place. We're in touch with the government in Khartoum.

QUESTION: So you would not have deployed unless the Government of Khartoum gave the blessing to let these people --

AMBASSADOR HERBST: In that instance, yes, yes. But there are other possible -- different situations.

QUESTION: Okay. But would they go in to a place where the government in place did not want them?

AMBASSADOR HERBST: It depends upon circumstances. I mean, if you define, for example, the Government of Afghanistan as the Taliban back in 2001 then the answer would be yes. There are other circumstances where that would not be the case.

QUESTION: So you're saying if there was like a U.S. invasion somewhere or an international intervention, or whatever you want to call it, then a team like this could go in there. But it could also be in a country that's facing some conflict like Kenya, for instance.

AMBASSADOR HERBST: A country which would like our assistance in dealing with the problem and we see it in our interest to provide that assistance. Again, this is a capability meant to be used in a variety of circumstances.

QUESTION: Go ahead, sorry.

QUESTION: I was just wondering how is this corps going to cooperate with the military? How do you envision the separation of duties?

AMBASSADOR HERBST: Our office has wonderful cooperation with the military. And they're our best -- our biggest backers. We are already doing lots of training with the military. I already mentioned that the interagency management system calls for drafting a plan of civilian operations. That plan of civilian operations would be put together in an interagency group which includes the military to ensure the best possible civilian-military coordination. If there's an operation where our military is on the ground, we would also send what we call an integration planning cell to the military headquarters to make sure that the theater level civilian and military operations are linked up. There -- in a multifaceted operation, there are clearly military components and civilian components and we would be doing civilian components but in harmony, and— including on the planning side with the military.

QUESTION: I just wanted to go back to your reference to the Taliban. Are you saying that -- I'm not using that as an example, but are you saying that this -- that these units could go in if the government didn't want them to, or if the recognized authority of the country -- I mean if -- let's say there's often times when authority is in dispute -- Somalia right now. Who do you get -- do you get permission from the TFG?

AMBASSADOR HERBST: Our policy -- because what you -- the question you are asking could apply just as well to American forces as well as its capability.

QUESTION: Right, that's what I'm -- and that's the subtly of the question, which is this kind of like a civilian invasion force that we're talking about here. It's going to come whether you want it or not.

AMBASSADOR HERBST: That's a --

QUESTION: We are going to rebuild your sewers and your--

AMBASSADOR HERBST: That's a hypothetical question and it's always a little bit dangerous to answer a hypothetical question. Let's just say that the situation you describe is one in which it's hard but not impossible to imagine putting civilians down, or civilians without the military down, let's put it that way.

QUESTION: Right.

MR. GALLEGOS: Okay, anybody else?

QUESTION: Thank you.

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