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**Presenter: Lawrence Di Rita, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs; Brigadier General David Rodriguez, Deputy Director for Regional Operations, Joint Staff Operations Directorate**

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EST**

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### Defense Department Briefing

MR. DI RITA: Good afternoon, and Happy New Year to those of you whom I haven't seen since the New Year.

I wanted to just take an opportunity to catch people up on a variety of things.

But one thing I wanted to acknowledge, which I think some of you may have captured while General Metz was briefing yesterday, but yesterday represented a traditional day in Iraq known as Army Day. January 6th has been the traditional Iraqi Army Day. Obviously it predates the Saddam Hussein regime. I'm told that it began 84 years ago with the birth of the Iraqi army as it existed during that era, 1921.

The Iraqis themselves celebrated it yesterday with a parade and with some announcements regarding some structure and some reorganizational merging into -- of the Iraqi army to give it a little bit better unit identity. It's something the Iraqis justifiably are quite proud of. The Iraqi prime minister spoke about it somewhat yesterday. I think we've got some facts -- or maybe the Multinational Corps has some facts or a fact sheet that we can provide to you. But it's quite a momentous time.

Obviously as the Iraqi elections draw near, Iraqi security forces are in fact shouldering a greater share of responsibility for security in Iraq. General Metz, General Chiarelli and the others who have briefed you recently have talked something about that.

I do want to comment on an issue of some interest today in particular, but let me just give you a little bit of context.

Prior to the transition to Iraqi sovereignty in the middle of last year, in early 2004 we dispatched -- the department dispatched an assessment team led by Army Major General Carl Eichenberry to evaluate the extant direction of Iraqi security force training operations as it existed -- again, at the time. It was a useful thing to have done. It was one of about five or six assessment teams that we sent during that period as the transition to Iraqi sovereignty loomed.

Working closely with coalition commanders and with Iraqi leaders -- civilian and military -- General Eichenberry made several recommendations that helped to put the development of Iraqi security forces on the

present path. Commander of the Central Command, the commander of Multinational Corps in Iraq, the chairman, secretary have agreed over the period of the past several weeks that it would be useful to provide another assessment. And General Gary Luck, whom I think some of you may know, served as the embedded senior mentor to General Franks and General Abizaid during the development of what became known as Operation Iraqi Freedom, has agreed to lead the assessment team.

General Luck has been very involved in the last year or more, couple of years, with lessons learned that are being done by the Joint Forces Command of Iraqi Freedom and of the war plan and of subsequent security force development, et cetera. There's been a number of lessons learned tapped off of that effort. We've briefed, I think, some of those things. General Luck's been involved in that. He's been, I'm told, to Iraq probably four or five times since the major combat phase. He was recently there at General Casey's request to take a look at the way the Multinational Corps headquarters are organized.

He's just a wealth of knowledge and has been used in a variety of mentoring capacities for a lot of senior general officers and has agreed to develop an assessment team to go look at Iraqi security force development, take a look at where we are at the moment, make recommendations, give General Casey and the others responsible for this an assessment of how they might continue to accelerate the integration of Iraqi security forces into the Iraqi structure over there.

So it's something that's important. It's something that we try and provide these kinds of assessments over time, and this is another one of those assessments. And I suspect we'll have a few questions on it, opportunity to discuss it a little bit.

And with that, I'll ask maybe General Rodriguez to give some discussion about some other points.

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Thank you, Mr. Di Rita. And good afternoon.

Security for the 18 provinces in Iraq with the ballot distribution and polling sites remains a priority. Multinational forces and Iraqi security forces will continue offensive operations to ensure that conditions are set to support a safe and secure environment for the upcoming 30 January elections.

Operation Unified Assistance is ongoing in Southeast Asia, as you all know. We're working closely with local officials, U.N. personnel and over a dozen other countries and agencies who are assisting with the relief efforts. More than 13,000 U.S. military personnel have distributed over 365 tons of supplies. Air crews have flown more than 450 rescue, recovery and supply missions and almost 900 hours of flight time to bring aid to the people of the affected areas.

And with that, we'll take your questions.

MR. DI RITA: Mr. Aldinger?

Q Larry, I'm led to believe, speaking to some other people in this building, that Gary Luck's portfolio will be much broader; that while it will be -- the major thing perhaps be an assessment of Iraqi training and integration, that he will have a much broader portfolio, looking into the overall policy, military policy and situation in Iraq. Is that not true, or is that the only thing --

MR. DIRITA: That's not true. I mean, it's just not accurate. He's --

Q So the only thing he's going to look at is military -- is training --

MR. DIRITA: His mission is to go over there and take a look at Iraqi security force development, where

are we, how's it going, provide an assessment to the commanders over there. And as I said, he has a wealth of knowledge. He's one -- he's a source that General Casey and others -- General Abizaid -- have tapped from time to time. He's an extraordinarily intelligent individual and a very studious individual. He knows an awful lot about what we're doing in Iraq. But his mission and his objective is to provide some assessment of where we -- how we're doing with the security forces.

Q And that's the only thing he'll do?

MR. DIRITA: That's his mission.

Q Does he have a civilian equivalent, a civilian counterpart?

MR. DI RITA: I don't know the full composition of the team. He's a civilian, obviously; he's a retired general. But this is primarily security force expertise that we're looking for, that kind of, you know -- it's more than training and equipping because, you know, there's security forces, how they're organized and how they're being used and how they interact with other segments of the Iraqi -- you know, there's police officers and -- but it's security forces writ large.

Q Larry, is there concern about how things are going with the security forces? Is this something the commanders asked for? The prior assessment by Mr. Eichenberry was done at a time when I think most people acknowledge that things weren't going well with the Iraqi security forces. Is this an indication you're concerned about it?

MR. DI RITA: I would describe it the way I did, which is the Iraqi security forces are getting more and more involved in the security of Iraq. And there are some areas where they've just performed very impressively, and there's a desire to stay on track and see that they continue to perform to their utmost potential. And any ability that we have to help the folks, to help the trainers take a look and assess is -- we all think is a good thing to do. You're always -- when you're assessing something continuously, it's difficult to determine if you're assessing it because you're concerned or you're assessing it because you want to continue to improve. I wouldn't characterize it beyond the way I did.

Q So, I mean --

MR. DI RITA: It's a continual assessment, and this will help provide some expertise that is not involved in day-to-day concerns about contracting and do we have the right equipment. They can come in with a look that's a little more detached, and that's always helpful.

Q But, Larry, you painted a pretty bright picture there, and -- things going well, I mean --

MR. DI RITA: I painted a bright picture? I'm painting a picture, and you can describe it.

Q Yeah. Sure. Okay. I would describe what you just said as a pretty bright picture, and you didn't express any real concerns. Are you saying there aren't any real concerns about the Iraqi security forces?

MR. DI RITA: I wouldn't feel competent to discuss it beyond the way our own commanders have discussed it. And they've discussed it in the terms that I just provided you, which is many areas -- General Metz this week talked about some impressive operations that have been conducted by the Iraqi security forces. There's always -- this is a new enterprise for Iraq, and so there's an interest in seeing a mid-grade officer corps develop. And that's something that a lot of people are spending time trying to make sure we're doing all we can to help that along.

There's areas where the Iraqi security forces have performed well. There's areas where they've performed sub-optimally, you know, not as well. There's areas where they've been overwhelmed by their opposition and have had to step back and live to fight another day. And there's areas where they've just plain not participated in the fight. But the general trend is in the right direction toward a lot better integration with the coalition and a lot better -- a greater and rising percentage of the security responsibility of Iraq. I mean, the trends are in the proper direction. It's a question of acceleration and how well can we get it done, and quickly.

Q And, I'm sorry. Did General Casey and General Abizaid ask for this, or was this something the secretary wanted?

MR. DI RITA: It's very difficult to parse how decisions like this are made. I guess I'd say that if it turns out that everybody is happy with the way this goes, there'll be a thousand people claiming credit for it. And if it turns out that it's less useful than others wished it might be, they'll all blame Rumsfeld.

But it's something that has -- you know, they talk several times a day, multiple times a week. And they've been talking about evaluating where we think we are with Iraqi security forces for probably six or eight weeks. So -- and it would be hard for me to describe, you know, how an idea germinates around here. But I know that if it's --

Q General Rodriguez?

MR. DI RITA: -- if it's a popular, there will be a lot of people claiming credit for it.

Q A question about the election. President Bush has said that there won't be a delay in the election. And General Metz said yesterday that if the election were held today, four of the provinces you could not hold an election in.

I'm wondering, can you tell us, without revealing, you know, operational details about future operations, what is the plan over the next 23 days to get those four provinces in shape for an election?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: I think General Metz talked about that. They're putting emphasis on those areas with offensive operations to decrease the effectiveness -- or the insurgency to negatively impact the election. And that's where their focus of effort is, and that's what they're going to do between now and the election.

MR. DI RITA: By the way -- let me just -- if I can just interrupt for a second. That's not clear to me, that General Metz said what you said he said; that if the elections were held today, they couldn't be -- he acknowledged that there are some areas where it's going to be more difficult than others. But I'd be very careful. Maybe he said that. I just don't think he did.

Q I mean, he thought he said that four of the provinces weren't ready to have an election. My question was just, is it just a military, I mean, effort? And you said that there's going to be military operations. I mean --

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Well, I thought that was just a military effort. The Iraqi, you know, election commission is doing all kinds of things to assist with that, too. But I talked about the military part of it only.

Q And you've confident that by the 30th that the military efforts, combined with the other efforts, will --

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Right. That's the goal, and that's the intent. And that's what we're heading --

MR. DI RITA: Here's what General Metz said, just to be very clear. He was asked a question: "You

said that 14 of 18 provinces are prepared and secured to hold elections. Is the corollary to that that four are not prepared and secured?"

His answer: "Well, Al Anbar, Nineveh, parts of Baghdad and, I think, (Salahuddin ?) is the next as you would rank them. Those are four areas that we see enough of the attacks, and we're going to continue to focus our energies and effort."

I mean, that -- so I'd just characterize it by using what he said. And there's four areas where there's more violence going on than we wish was going on. But there's going to be elections in Iraq, and they're going to be held on January 30th, and this is as the result of the Transition Administrative Law, the U.N. Security Council resolution, and the will of the Iraqi people. And General Chiarelli talked about polls that indicate 70 to 80 -- and these are Iraqi polls -- of the people in Iraq want elections. So --

Q General Rodriguez, how would you characterize the current capability of the Iraqi military?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: The -- I'm not going to characterize that. I think the commanders have done a good job on that in multiple occasions. And I think what Larry said is what anybody would say, is obviously they've done well in certain areas. In other areas, they have not done as well as we wanted. So -- and that's why part of the, you know, assessment is going over to check that out.

Q Can you give us any idea of whether you're on track purely in terms of the numbers of trained military and security personnel that you expected to have at this time, setting aside for a moment how --

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Right. As far as the trained and equipped personnel, yeah, we're about on track. That's correct.

Q Do you have any -- do you know what those numbers are?

MR. DI RITA: Metz gave some numbers yesterday. I think he said there are 60 battalions that are operational at the moment, and he had some metrics for how many more they wanted. We can provide what we think our time line is. I think we've done that along the way, and we'll see if there's another.

Q Do you think any of those battalions are equivalent at all in capability to a U.S. unit? Is -- are they? Have any Iraqi forces achieved the level of training and capability that would make them on the par with American military forces?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Well, the --

MR. DI RITA: Let me -- and then, General -- I mean, you're free to try -- there is probably no battalions in the world that are on par with U.S. battalions. So that's the wrong comparison. Are they on par with their opponents inside of Iraq? Increasingly, yes, and increasingly they're becoming very capable. Are they on par with other security forces in the region? They're going to be there. But to compare them to United States of America, there is -- again, there's probably no battalions in the world that are on par with the United States of America. It's an unfair metric.

Do you have anything --

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Nor is that the goal to make them, you know, as proficient and equipped and fully modernized as American battalions.

Q Well, are any of them -- have any of them met 100 percent of their objectives in terms of what your

goals are in this department?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Yes, there have been several of them that have done that. Well, one of the examples that many people have understood and watched and seen multiple times -- been the 36th National Guard Battalion. It's done a tremendous job in multiple operations in different places, both in conjunction with U. S. and coalition forces and on their own.

MR. DI RITA: And believe me, the mentoring that the U.S. is doing with them will get them more up to speed and that's important, and there needs to be more of that. And you know, the assessment that General Luck can provide can perhaps offer some additional insights into how we can achieve the objective I think you're trying to get to, which is, you know, good enough for the region, good enough for their potential adversaries, and good enough for security inside of Iraq. I mean, that's got to be how we measure it.

Carl?

Q Larry, to what extent are there discussions going on in this building about extending the tour of Army Reserves and National Guard beyond 24 months? Can you shed any light on that?

MR. DI RITA: What there's a lot of discussion about is how do we accelerate the transformation of the United States Army into a force that is needed for this century. And that involves a wide range of notions. The core of that is the redesign of the Army's combat power through what the Army describes as modularity. But what it really means is more rapidly deployable, agile, flexible and powerful units that are more capable at lower levels than the current division structure permits. And the chief of staff of the Army and the secretary of the Army are embarked on a very ambitious plan to transform the Army by developing about a 30 percent increase in the capability -- the combat capability of the deployable units in the Army by using the temporary head room provided for by the emergency authorities that we have that the Congress has provided. That's really the focus of Army transformation.

Along with that, there's a lot of work going on to rebalancing the skills that we need out of the Reserves and into the active force. That's taking time, but there's an enormous amount of energy behind it and there's progress being made. In addition to that, there's a lot of conversion of currently military units, military billets into civilian. We've probably converted or have scheduled to convert tens of thousands of billets that are currently held by military people, using new authority that the Congress has provided to make it easier to put civilians in those billets.

While all that's happening, there's going to be transition needs that might result in the temporary -- for example, the temporary additional forces that we have in the Army right now. I mean, we are above end strength because the authority permits that.

The Army is currently assessing all of the other options that can be done temporarily. So there's thinking going on. And when there's thinking, there's a lot of leaking, and when there's leaking, there's a lot of breathless reporting. But the Army is looking at a wide range, but there are no proposals, recommendations that have been presented to do that, what you described, to make permanent any of the things that are temporary right now. We've got a range of initiatives going on to analyze the stress on the force and what can be done.

But at the core of it -- and you're going to see it, I think, reflected when the president submits the budget for this department -- we have recommended, the department has recommended a lot of focus on Army transformation, and I think we'll see some of that in the coming year or two in terms of resources being applied to that problem. Money.

Q Is increasing the 24 months among the items that are being discussed, ruminated, bandied about?

MR. DI RITA: There's no specific recommendation on that, so I would --

Q Is that being discussed? You said a whole number of things are being discussed. Is that one of the issues being discussed?

MR. DI RITA: I am unaware of all of the things the Army is looking at that would ultimately become proposals, so I -- there's no proposal to do that that I'm aware of.

Q How would General Luck's analysis of what he finds play into that? Will it be --

MR. DI RITA: It's not related to it.

Q Not related to it at all.

MR. DI RITA: Not related at all.

Yes?

Q Mr. Di Rita, do you think with sending General Gary Luck to Iraq, that DOD is looking to put a new military strategy on the ground, especially that the political strategy after the election would be changed, would be different?

MR. DI RITA: I believe I've answered that. General Luck's mission is what I described, and I just don't need to expand on that.

Q A follow-up to the modularity question. There was a budget decision made that modularity was actually the benefactor by about \$25 billion, and accompanied with that was a \$30 billion cut to various weapons programs that will likely show up in the budget that's coming out soon. Can you give us some context to that? Can you tell us whether that was a reflection of some sort of very constricted budget environment, or was this an already-planned transformation move?

MR. DI RITA: There's a lot of things in your question that are -- I can't comment on because they're specific numbers that we're not prepared to discuss.

Q You can't discuss general cuts?

MR. DI RITA: I don't think anybody, when they see our budget, will discuss it in terms of cuts because this budget -- our defense spending in this country has gone up 40 percent in the last three years. I'll get to it.

Q (Off mike) -- has already discussed cuts.

MR. DI RITA: I'll get to it. The defense spending in this department has gone up something on the order of 35 (percent) or 40 percent since '01. I expect, although these decisions aren't final, that there will be an increase in the defense spending this year as well; in other words, the fiscal year 2006 budget will be more than the fiscal year 2005 budget, and I'm laying aside supplementals and everything else. I know that the definition of a cut in Washington is when you don't spend as much as you wish you could spend, but a cut the way the rest of the world thinks about it is you're spending less than you were spending yesterday or in the previous period. That's not likely to happen in our budget.

Again, without discussing details and specifics, I think what you'll see in this budget is continued

commitment to transforming this department into the kind of 21st-century, network-centric, agile, lethal, based on precision, based on an accelerated transformation of the Army into the kind of army I described earlier. And then when the budget comes out, we can all look at the numbers and decide whether it's closer to the way I described it or closer to the way you described it.

Q But numbers aside, are you saying, then, that the -- leading up to the budget submission to Congress, that transformation was the number one issue, or was there any sort of issue of constrained --

MR. DI RITA: Transformation is the number one issue in the development of this budget. There's no question about it.

Q The changes in the press are reflective of a transformation agenda?

MR. DI RITA: Excuse me?

Q The changes reflected in the press, then, are a reflection of a transformation agenda?

MR. DI RITA: I don't know what press articles you're referring to. Maybe one you wrote? I maybe didn't see it. But -- (laughter) --

Q I think -- (inaudible) -- wrote them, actually.

MR. DI RITA: When the budget comes out, we'll be happy to discuss it in great detail, and then people can draw their own conclusions. The budget that I -- that we've recommended and that I think has received general support and has been generally, in the broadest brush strokes, outlined to some of the -- some members of Congress is what I described: a continued commitment to transformation of this department, a continued -- an acceleration of Army transformation, an acceleration of a host of other important, both technological and organizational, initiatives. And once all the numbers are available, we can all parse them and look at it.

Q Larry, did Secretary Rumsfeld read General Helmly's memo?

MR. DI RITA: I don't know.

Q What's the reaction been to that memo?

MR. DI RITA: Again, there's a lot of thinking going on. That was an internal document that reflected the musings of one officer to another officer on an important topic, and it's unfortunate that it leaked. And it's unfortunate that people have drawn conclusions as though thinking equals decisions.

But, I mean, I don't have a specific comment on his reaction to the memo because I don't know that he read it.

Q Well, like the Reserves are degenerating into a broken force, specifically.

MR. DI RITA: I don't know. I mean, the Reserves are performing magnificently, and they're doing an enormous amount of important work around the world. I think people who are in the Reserves feel very good about what they're doing. We're meeting our retention goals, for the most, part across the board in the Reserves.

(To General Rodriguez) I don't know if you have anything you want to --

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: No.

Q General?

MR. DI RITA: Over here.

Q There's been a lot of discussion recently of the effort to improve the armor protection of vehicles for the U.S. military in Iraq to adapt to the insurgency tactics there. Yesterday the insurgents carried out a devastating attack on a Bradley Fighting Vehicle, one of the most heavily armored in the U.S. inventory. Is that not symbolic of the fact that the insurgency continues to be able to adapt its tactics more quickly than the U.S. military does?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Well, the attack on the Bradley -- we've noticed in the recent couple of weeks that the IEDs are all being built more powerfully, with more explosive effort in a smaller number of IEDs. And that trend has occurred over the last, you know, two weeks here.

But again, the IED challenge is not purely going to be met with armored vehicles, because -- I think I explained before, we've lost a tank, the most heavily armored vehicle in the world, and a Bradley like -- just the other day that you discussed. But the response and the way we're going to overcome that is a multi-pronged effort on tactics, techniques, procedures, intelligence, and a wide range of things to prevent that from hurting our soldiers.

MR. DI RITA: Let me -- if I can add a little bit to that. I would refer you back to what I believe it was General Metz and Chiarelli both talked about with the IED threat.

General Chiarelli believes for every IED that goes off he's finding one. So he thinks he's about one for one in terms of what's out there -- you don't know the universe of what's out there, but he feels like he's increasing -- again, to the point that General Rodriguez made -- the going after, finding these things, as opposed to protect perfectly, is one of the priorities. And General Chiarelli believes he's making progress in that regard.

General Metz believes -- and he talked about it in his press conference -- that the sophistication of these things has actually decreased. And he described some indicators as to why he believed that.

So it's difficult to assess the trend on this particular threat, but it's one that we're going after aggressively through many, many of directions, as General Rodriguez described.

Q General Rodriguez -- can I follow up, though? You said you're noticing something, you mentioned, the last two weeks -- if I understood you correctly -- IEDs being built more powerfully, but smaller. Are you seeing --

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: A lower number of IEDs, but they've been more powerful. So for example --

Q Are you seeing a different type of explosive, are you seeing a different design --

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: No. It's more explosives in the IEDs.

Q Do you --

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: So a larger IED instead of the high number of IEDs.

Q (Off mike) --

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: They've been less in number and larger in size and explosive power.

Q Does this lead you to believe it is just simply a change, or do you think there are essentially new bomb makers, new designers that have entered Iraq? Because in the past you have noted the emergence of new designs and you've speculated that there have been new people making them. What do you think's going on here?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: I think it's too early to tell at this point right now. But we'll continue to watch that carefully like they have been in both the efforts that General Chiarelli mentioned that seem to be making some positive impact on the challenge.

Q And can I just also follow up? The new types of IEDs you're seeing: Location-wise, are they across the country, are they mainly in Baghdad, are they in the Sunni Triangle? Where are you seeing them?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: It's been mainly in the Sunni Triangle.

Q General, to follow up on that, can you give us any sense of what they're using? Is it strapping three artillery shells together? Is it, you know, plastic explosives? I mean, the sophistication --

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: It's been a combination of everything. The point that I was trying to make was just the explosive power of them has seemed to increase in the last couple weeks.

MR. DI RITA: But I would say again -- I would caution you to go back to Metz's characterization, which is that they've gone -- his impression is they're less sophisticated, more spectacular, I think is the fair characterization of how he described it.

Q That's not a good combination, Larry.

MR. DI RITA: What's that?

Q That's not a good combination.

MR. DI RITA: I'm just describing it. I'm not trying to characterize it.

Q Can I ask you another question on a different subject?

MR. DI RITA: I mean, he gave some examples and I wouldn't want to try and repeat them. You can go back and read the transcript.

Q And the budget. I have to push back a little bit here. You're saying this year's -- the '06 budget will be greater than --

MR. DIRITA: I'm saying no decisions have been made.

Q Well, the PBD though --

MR. DI RITA: I think people will be able to evaluate it when the numbers come out.

Q The PBD describes cuts after '08 of \$30 billion; '06 and '07 are largely neutral. So --

MR. DI RITA: We'll talk numbers when the budget comes out.

Q I just want to clarify that because you're --

MR. DI RITA: I told you what I told you. We'll talk numbers --

Q Has OMB approved that PBD's numbers?

MR. DI RITA: We'll talk numbers when the budget comes out.

Q I'm not asking numbers but just general concepts.

MR. DI RITA: Your question ended in the word "numbers," question mark.

Q I didn't say the numbers -- (laughter).

MR. DI RITA: New topic.

Q Can I go back to --

MR. DIRITA: Maybe we've got time for one or two more.

Q Back to the election. Is the current thinking that offensive operations between now and January 30th will allow elections to take place in all 18 provinces?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: I think when General Metz talked about that that was exactly what he was talking about, that we're going to focus all our energy and efforts on the trying to get the elections to be as best as they possibly can be secured for the 30 January elections. And he's focusing on those four areas that he talked about.

MR. DI RITA: I'll give you another crack.

Q Okay. Talking about the budget, is it --

MR. DI RITA: Agghhh.

Q Yeah, but it's my last question with numbers.

MR. DIRITA: You didn't do very well on your previous one.

Q Is there any link between the increasing of the budget for the Army of \$25 million and the consequences of the war in Iraq?

MR. DI RITA: First of all, I'm not talking numbers. I think I made that clear. (Laughter.) You used a number which I'm not going to acknowledge.

The Army is going through a transformation. It is everybody's desire that that transformation proceed as rapidly as is possible. And you'll see -- I believe that our budget will reflect that. The war in Iraq up until now, for a variety of decisions that have been made between the Congress and the executive branch, has been principally funded through supplemental appropriations, so it's in a sense a separate matter.

Q All right. It's not a numbers question.

MR. DIRITA: Two more. New subject. No numbers.

Q Specialist Graner went on trial this morning. His lawyer says not only, whatever he did, he was following orders, but that he questioned some of the orders and he was told by senior commanders that this is legal and go ahead and do it. Can you say for sure that that didn't happen?

MR. DI RITA: Well, I can't comment on the specifics of a criminal trial, and that's what he's undergoing, is a criminal trial. There was no policy of -- there was no policy, and none of the investigations that have been concluded to date have been able to draw a connection between the activity at Abu Ghraib, and particularly the activity that Specialist Graner was alleged to have participated in, and any approved policies of this department. And I'll leave it at that.

Q Wolfowitz. Can you shed any light on his future?

MR. DI RITA: He's doing a terrific job. He's a man of enormous capability and he's serving as the deputy secretary of Defense.

Q Has the secretary asked him to stay, and has he agreed to stay?

MR. DI RITA: I can't comment on -- I mean, I just don't know the nature of the -- I think Paul's intention is to stay. He's serving in the job. I think it's a job that the secretary would be very happy if he did stay in it. He's performing magnificently and as value added in everything he's involved with.

Q Can you be more definite than you think he's going to stay?

MR. DI RITA: I don't -- I'll stick with what I said. He's doing great and he's in the job, and as far as I understand, he intends to stay in the job and the secretary would be very happy if he did.

Q Is there any reason he wouldn't stay? (Laughter.)

Q General, could you set our expectations for the election security? I can think of the situation where things could go pretty well in 15 or 14 provinces and there could be some spectacular car bombs in some others. What are you guys looking at to say all in all practically this is a good result or this is much worse than what we expected? What would be a reasonably good result, given the realities on the ground?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Clearly the Iraqi people are going to be the ones who determine the success of the election, the legitimacy of how that goes, and that's what we're trying to support the interim Iraqi government in accomplishing so that they have a free and fair election as best as it possibly can happen.

Q Right, but you guys are -- have the responsibility for security.

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: The security forces, that's correct.

Q And so what is an outcome on the ground that you think, "Okay, that'll be pretty good?" You've got to be coming up with some best-case and worst-case scenarios.

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: We want as many people who want to vote be able to get to the polling stations and cast their vote. That's what the goal is, that's what we continue to focus on, and we're continuing to take the operations required to get there.

Q Okay, but reality of satellite television and the way things are, and you guys are going to complain about this the day after, if there are cameras at one car bomb --

MR. DI RITA: We'll complain about it now, then. Give us a crack. (Laughter.)

Q If there's a car bomb and there are cameras there, the world is going to look at this election and there's going to be a lot of hand-wringing about it -- it shouldn't have gone on, the security was too bad, or you know, this whole thing was a disaster. What is the metric you guys are going to be using at that point to say, "You know what, there was one car bomb, but that's okay" -- (laughs) -- "because we were afraid of 50," or if there are 10, that's within the bounds of what we were expecting and we will have considered that a success?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: No, I don't think there's any metrics established that I know of at this point.

MR. DI RITA: I'll give -- and it was your example, not mine; that's the way it happened in Afghanistan. And the contemporaneous reporting of the elections was this is really bad, there's all kinds of challenges and conflicts, and about six weeks later, they inaugurated a president. So you know, there will be a national assembly that comes out of this election, and that's a great thing and that's the metric. There will be an election and there will be a national assembly.

MR. DI RITA: Last question.

Q One of the early goals from commanders on the ground was that the elections be held without U.S. troops in U.S. uniforms standing outside the polling sites, and that it be handled almost entirely by the Iraqi security forces. Is that possible, given the state of affairs now?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: I think General Metz discussed that the other day. He said that is the plan. They continue to coordinate that plan with the interim Iraqi government as well as the Iraqi security forces, that those are the people that are closest to the polling stations and the United States is there to support -- the United States and coalition forces are there to support them as required.

MR. DI RITA: Thanks a lot, folks. Have a great weekend!

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