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

**Thursday, January 13, 2005 3:08 p.m. EST**

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## Defense Department Operational Update Briefing

MR. DIRITA: Well, good afternoon. Obviously we were pleased this morning that the president came by and, I think, received a couple of good updates, one on the tsunami activity that's going on with the countries involved and with the United States assistance that's going on out there. It was a good update for the president, I hope. He also received a briefing on the global war on terror, and I think he spoke a little bit about it before he departed the building.

I also want to draw attention, for reporters that may not have seen it, to General Batiste's brief this morning. And if you didn't get a chance to see the brief, I would encourage you to look at the transcript. He put out some very useful information regarding activities in Iraq in his area of responsibility, particularly with respect to the development of Iraqi security forces and the preparations for the Iraqi elections, which are coming up in just a few weeks. And everybody's getting ready for that.

And General Rodriguez, do you have any comments? If not, we'll be happy to just take some questions.

Q Larry, has the Pentagon received a formal request -- formal advisory from the Indonesian government that U.S. military aid workers need to be out of the country by the end of March? And does that in any way alarm or concern the Pentagon that you won't be able to get the job done by the end of March?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: No, we haven't got an official thing. We obviously saw the -- I guess the vice president said something about that -- the Indonesian vice president. But the bottom line is, we're there to support the host nations and do the relief efforts as best we can, to help relieve the suffering of all the people in that region. We're going to continue to do that until our capabilities are no longer needed, and we'll continue to coordinate with the host nation, with the U.N. and the relief organizations to support that effort.

Q On a related topic, the Lincoln leaving the Indonesian waters -- can you discuss why that happened? It's been reported that they were denied authority to fly in Indonesian airspace from the carrier --

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: The carrier -- first of all, you know, the focus is the relief efforts, and that's what we're doing. And we continue to coordinate with the host nations.

In this case here, they -- this is a flexible force that does a lot of things. One of the things they have to do is maintain the readiness of the air wing. And what that does -- and we do it everywhere, very, very sensitive to all the host nations, everywhere -- when we do that, we move some distance away to get into the wind and get in the proper position, so we can do those air operations. That's what they're doing. And the commander is, you know, very comfortable with what they're doing.

MR. DIRITA: And he's also very comfortable with all of the opportunities that the Lincoln Battle Group has to conduct its mission, which is humanitarian operations. They have all the --

Q So they're continuing to --

(Cross talk.)

Q They're just moving to conduct flight operations for --

MR. DIRITA: Training and --

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: For training and readiness. They have to keep that --

Q Were they denied permission to fly fighter aircraft in Indonesian airspace?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: I don't specifically know that. I do not know that.

MR. DIRITA: But Admiral Fargo spoke to this this morning. He's quite comfortable. He feels very good, as does General Blackman, about the cooperation and interaction that they've had with the host governments who have been providing all of the access needed for the humanitarian operation, and we're working very closely with those host governments. So Admiral Fargo -- this is a non-issue to Admiral Fargo, and I believe he's quite comfortable with the mission he's been assigned in assistance to these countries. Nick?

Q Human Rights Watch has published a new report and called for a special prosecutor to be appointed to investigate the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandals. And its spokesman has said that the abuse of prisoners is a predictable result of an environment created by a series of policy positions taken at the highest level. Would you care to respond to that?

MR. DIRITA: Well, I think out of a dozen investigations there have been eight or nine reports come out, none of which have made that same conclusion. In fact, the reports that have looked at policy have concluded that there is in fact no policy of abuse. The Schlesinger panel found that, the Kern-Fay-Jones panel found that. Admiral Church is about to wrap up his investigation, and he will conclude the same thing. So there's -- it's factually incorrect what the individual may have been saying, and I didn't see the announcement.

This has been investigated in a variety -- from a variety of different perspectives -- military intelligence, military police, Reserves, special operators. We have a number of -- I think there have been something on the order of four or five dozen criminal referrals already. There continue to be investigations of specific allegations, and there will be more investigations and more announcements of possibly criminal or administrative proceedings. So there's been an awful lot of investigation into this. There will be more. There will be more announcements to be made. But --

Q I think the nub of this complaint is that this is self- investigation, and what they're saying is we need a genuinely independent --

MR. DIRITA: Look, the United States military conducts criminal investigations probably on the order of

tens of thousands a year. And there's a process for that. There's an entire court system established for criminal investigations within the United States military. There's a statute called the Uniform Code of Military Justice that provides for investigatory authority. There's an entire process that includes the ability for sort of grand jury-type investigations to take place, known as Article 32. There's a very sophisticated, very time-tested, very effective investigatory capability within the United States military, and as I said, there are probably -- I'm sure this number is very low -- more than 10,000 criminal investigations performed every year in the United States military. So --

Q Would this building oppose a special independent civilian prosecutor looking into the overall --

MR. DIRITA: I don't -- I'd rather not discuss hypotheticals. But I can say that it's not necessary.

What do you have?

Q A couple questions on Indonesia and one on Iraq. Do I understand you to say that the thing with the Lincoln moving off -- the way it works is, Lincoln's there, providing humanitarian relief, lots of helicopter's coming and going. You need to do some training. They couldn't get clearance for the airspace that close to land, so they moved out further and can still reach land with helicopters, so it's no issue?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Yes.

Q Okay.

MR. DIRITA: And I would -- let me -- I would qualify it modestly by saying you said they couldn't get clearance, which implies something like permission being sought and not received. That -- I don't know if that's accurate or not. The fact is, the battle group commander is comfortable with the airspace management that he's using to conduct training, in one hand --

Q Yes.

MR. DIRITA: -- which has nothing to do with the humanitarian operations, and with all of the access that he needs to perform the mission of humanitarian operations. So --

Q A question about the policy with regard to Marines being armed when they're doing this kind of work. Could you explain where they are allowed to carry arms, where they're not, and why you guys are comfortable with that, especially in a region that does have some terrorism-related violence?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, we're not going to talk to specific force protection measures but make sure everybody understands here. Our troops are trained, they're prepared, and they're well-equipped to defend themselves, if necessary, and that PACOM and all the military forces over there are cooperating with the -- coordinating with the host nations' forces to maintain the appropriate security level.

Q Okay. And then just a quick Iraq one. There was attacks overnight and this morning on Ayatollah Sistani -- two of his top lieutenants. He's obviously a critical figure in Iraq. Is the United States doing anything to step up security around Najaf or do anything to reinforce his personal security?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: No, just to continue the offensive operations to reduce the effectiveness of the insurgency.

MR. DIRITA: Yeah?

Q Thanks. What can you tell us about the position of the undersecretary for Acquisition, Technology

and Logistics? Does Mr. Wynne plan to leave now that it appears that his nomination is not going to be renewed? And do you have any thought on any possible successors, possibly from inside the building?

MR. DIRITA: Well, when we have something to announce on that, we'll be sure to announce it. But I'm not in a position to discuss Mr Wynne's plans. And again, we just don't have anything to announce. But we tend to announce these things in good order when there's been decisions made, and there's just no decisions made. Mr. Wynne's the acting undersecretary by virtue of his current position as the principal deputy in that component, and he's doing that job.

Yeah?

Q I've got an Inauguration question. What beefed-up -- in general, beefed-up security around the Washington area is the military planning over the next week? There's been some Stinger/Avenger units in the area, and you know, it's not unprecedented for you guys to talk a little bit about that. And who would have response-- is this a NORAD mission over the sky over Washington? Could you just flesh this out a little bit?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: For the Inauguration, you know, we're -- obviously, we're not the lead federal agency, but we're supporting this request with security forces and medical forces and that type. Then you'd -- for the specifics of your question, you'd have to get with the military coordination committee who's working that with the lead federal agency. And NORAD is our supported commander in the military.

Q And let me add a quick non-number budget question. On the supplemental, what --

MR. DIRITA: A non-number budget --

Q Yeah. What's the thinking in the building about blending a tsunami relief supplemental with an Iraq supplemental, all kind of one global bill? Is that being considered?

MR. DIRITA: I don't know. The -- I know that there's been some kind of moving funds around the current authorities to -- in order to sustain the operation as it stands. And as the needs are developed and we have a better feel for it, we'll -- if there's additional authorities needed or additional money needed, we'll certainly ask for it. But I just -- I couldn't answer your specific question as to whether it would be part of an '05 supplemental. I just don't know.

Q Sir, yesterday Secretary Powell said that -- in an interview that Iraqi forces by the end of 2005 should be able to assume much more responsibility. He said we should start seeing U.S. numbers going in the other direction. Today General Batiste painted a pretty glowing picture of the Iraqi forces he's working with. Judging overall across Iraq, are there benchmarks for U.S. pullback by the end of 2005 in this building?

MR. DIRITA: Let me make a general comment and then if General Rodriguez has anything to add -- the -- first of all, to describe General Batiste's comments as "glowing" is your word.

Q He said some glowing things.

MR. DIRITA: He said things. You are describing them. (Laughter.)

The -- Secretary Powell's -- there's no timeline against which decisions are being made with respect to the force levels in Iraq. It's situation-dependent. The commanders assess it regularly. I think there's no question that the -- that what you said Secretary Powell said regarding everybody's expectation about the growing capability of the Iraqi security forces is accurate. We -- General Batiste spoke about that in his own area of responsibility, the growing capability of those security forces, and that's pretty much the case around the

country. But there's no timeline against which decisions are being considered with respect to U.S. forces in the country.

Q Isn't it fair to assume that as the chart goes up for Iraqi forces, that the chart starts going down for U.S. forces?

MR. DIRITA: Well, again, the chart has in fact been going up for Iraqi forces. And U.S. forces have been what they have been, which is up, down, up, down, and it -- and I wouldn't want to handicap some relationship between those two graphs. But again, it's not timeline-dependent. It's situation-dependent. And as the commanders assess the progress of Iraqi security forces, they'll make recommendations on force levels.

(To the general.) Do you have anything you want to add?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: And just to make sure, besides just the two lines you're talking about, there are also the insurgency and the level of violence and stuff that's in that equation and everything, which is also linked to many things, as far as governance, infrastructure development, all that. So it's a pretty complex thing. So it's not nearly as simple as just the two lines going up or down.

Q Well, piggybacking on that, on when the force levels go down, are we talking about the force levels going down from the 150(,000), the enhanced presence, or the regular force that has been on the ground in Iraq?

MR. DIRITA: I'm not talking about force levels going down. What I'm talking about is that the commanders will assess the forces that are required and make recommendations on that basis. At the moment, we are at or on our way to about 150,000. How long that will be the required level, time will tell.

Amy?

Q Larry, regarding the leadership here at the Pentagon, some of which is turning over with the inauguration of the president coming up, can you give us some idea of what kind of strategy Mr. Rumsfeld and the president are going to take with regard to filling those positions as quickly as possible? Specifically, do you think the sort of business skills that were sought four years ago is still one of the forefront of, you know, skill being sought, or do you think maybe there's more of a focus on operational issues and things like that, given the war?

MR. DIRITA: I guess it just depends on the position that the secretary is making recommendations against. It's -- the secretary's -- I think -- the individuals that have been recruited for this department and nominated by the president, confirmed by the Senate, are people who are determined to be the best qualified at the position against which we're recruiting. And there's some criteria that we always evaluate for individual positions, and the secretary tends to be very systematic, as does the president and the presidential personnel team, in terms of evaluating criteria and evaluating candidates against those criteria. And the criteria are adjusted as necessary.

I think that the -- you mentioned the business criteria, and I think that that would -- you may be referring to service secretaries in particular. The service secretary position has responsibility for organizing, training and equipping -- the Title X responsibilities of the services. There's a range of skills that are needed in those jobs. And the capacity that an individual candidate has for that particular criteria is certainly something that we always evaluate. But there's a whole range of criteria, and I'm not in a position to sort of say what are the criteria. But it's -- again, we evaluate it all the time. We look at the needs of that particular position, given what's expected over the coming period of time, and make judgments based on that. So --

Q How long will it take?

MR. DIRITA: Well, it's not as quick a process as it ought to be. And there have been a number of analyses of the Senate -- of the confirmation process. There's a long lead time for the individual to work through the issues that need to be worked through just to be nominated, and then the committee takes a crack at it and has a whole range of things that are important to the committee. It's a process that has deserved and gotten a lot of scrutiny over the years, but unfortunately, the fact is it takes a heck of a long time and longer than it ought to.

Q On that issue, there was an article in the Early Bird today that raised a question about a statutory requirement that has some of these leading officials -- that requires them to have executive management skills, and that that may preclude certain favorable -- you know, officials seen as favorable by the administration from raising it to that level.

Is that something that you think the department might want to request some legislative relief on?

MR. DIRITA: I didn't see the article.

What do you got?

Q Do you have anything on the cause of the San Francisco accident, and/or a timeline on when the final word will come in?

MR. DIRITA: (To General Rodriguez.) Do you know about that?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: No, we don't. Obviously, there was contact between the submarine and something else. But the investigation is ongoing. As soon as we have that investigation, obviously, we'll share that with everybody, just like we do with most investigations.

Q Larry, can you just expand on the president's visit as far as the war on terror section? We got the tsunami relief update, but is it -- was it a broad overview of the war on terror?

MR. DIRITA: I think that's a fair description. There's a lot of activity going on. There are a lot of ideas about, you know, how we -- how we're organized for this -- for the war on terror and the kinds of things that we're doing that go beyond even things specific to this department. As the president has talked about, as the secretary has talked about, this is a war in which all elements of national power are at play. So it was a good, elevated discussion about a number of issues involved, but --

Q Not Iraq specifically?

MR. DIRITA: No, no. That's certainly a component in the global war on terror, but it was not an Iraq brief.

Q This is for General Rodriguez. One of the things General Batiste talked about today was the quick positioning of U.S. troops for quick deployments, quick reaction. He touched a little bit about the doubling of helicopters. From a macro perspective, can you give a sense of some of the things done? Were, you know, several hundred choppers brought in? Have Strykers been repositioned or other fast-moving vehicles?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: I don't have those kind of specifics, but the important part is the piece about the quick reaction to be able to support the interim Iraqi government and Iraqi security forces at their request and everything. So that's -- the piece and the organization to how they did that was so they could respond quickly,

but I don't have the specifics on, you know, increased numbers of things. You'd just have to let that for the theater to really, you know get into that kind of detail.

Q (Off mike) --a new concept of being able to respond quickly to point -- targets?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Well, it's -- because it's an election, it's spread over a larger area because of the spread of the election thing, but the specifics would have to come from the theater on that.

Q Larry, yesterday General Obering said, with regard to the national missile defense, that he doesn't know when or even if the system will be declared operational at some point. Do you know? Is there an intention to officially declare it operational, or is it just going to continue to be a -- sort of a spiral development program, or --

MR. DIRITA: Well, it's certainly going to continue to be a spiral development program. I mean, it's a program that is -- that is -- in which capabilities are being developed and tested. And once those capabilities are developed and tested, there's a sense and an understanding that there is an operational aspect to it.

I think the point he might have been trying to make is that we're not marching toward a particular date on which we will say the system is now operational. The system will have operational capability and within the operational capability of the system we'll continue to test it and refine it and evaluate the threat circumstances in the world to determine how fast or how slow we want to change its status over time.

Q Just to follow up on that. I mean --

MR. DIRITA: Let me just answer Bob.

Q I was just going to make the point that I thought that up to -- in the last year that the word had been that you were going to have it declared operational by the end of the year and then that seemed to go away. Have you changed your approach or --

MR. DIRITA: We haven't changed the approach. What we're dealing with is the reality of developing a system that's complex, that's new, that involves a lot of components. And as I said, it's -- it has a nascent operational capability but the focus is on continuing to improve that. And it's, as you've described it, a spiral-type activity that we've seen with other weapons systems that tend to be sophisticated and advanced but desirable. I mean, the Global Hawk and some other of these kinds of systems that we've employed but officially, in accordance with, you know, acquisition schedules and other procedures of the department, it was pre-operational, but we've used them. And I think it's a reasonable analogy for this system as well.

Q Just to follow up on that, Larry. The general yesterday seemed to indicate in his opinion that the system was already at the point that it had a degree of operational --

MR. DIRITA: I think that's accurate.

Q Do you think that the system has operational capability, and if so, why don't you just declare it operational?

MR. DIRITA: Well, I think I'll stand by what I just said with respect to declarations. General Obering has a -- I think far better than I -- understanding of the current status of it. But the -- and it does have an operational capability that we've discussed. But we're going to -- the focus is on continuing to develop this capability over time and evaluate the -- continue to evaluate the threat circumstances in the world. But there has been some expectation that there will be some point at which it is operational and not something else, and I just don't think

people should expect that for the near term.

Q But would it be safe --

Q (Off mike) -- no sense of remorse in this building that you've missed a deadline or a goal at the end of last year?

MR. DIRITA: I haven't noticed any sense of remorse on that particular point.

Q Would it be safe to say that --

MR. DIRITA: There may be some remorse; I just haven't noticed it.

Q Problems like this software glitch have created a hesitancy to formally declare --

MR. DIRITA: No, I don't -- I'm not aware of any relationship between this particular test and any kinds of -- any assessment of the overall capability of the system. This test was not tied to a timetable of deployability. I think that was discussed at the time of the test.

Yes?

Q Follow-up on that. Last year the STRATCOM folks had basically said that they would like to see where they could have a test mode and an operational mode that's probably -- kind of a flip of the switch. Are they cleared to do that at this point?

MR. DIRITA: I think that's a notion, that's a model. But it's driven in part by the capabilities of the system and the various rules that would be established for the use of the system. So I wouldn't think it would be the best way to think about it as an on/off type situation. I like the way I described it and I'm not sure I want to improve on it.

Q Larry, on --

MR. DIRITA: New topic, how about that? Somebody told me if I said "new topic" it ends the discussion.

Q It does, but that's when we say it. (Laughter.)

MR. DIRITA: Oh, that's you guys? What do I get to do?

Q How can you be so confident that this system you said has a nascent capability. It has not had a successful flight test since before December of '02. I mean, why --

MR. DIRITA: I go with the evaluation of the technical folks. And General Obering being the director of the program, has made that assessment that it does have a certain capability. But it's one that we're going to continue to try and improve upon.

Q And so you're confident this thing could hit a North Korean missile coming in?

MR. DIRITA: I'm confident in what I said. So --

Q Well, that's eloquent, but it's not informative. (Laughter.)

MR. DIRITA: (Laughs.) You've probably gotten used to that by now, haven't you?

Q Today's especially good.

Q Back to Iraq, could you give us an update on General Luck's mission? Is he there now? Has he begun his review?

MR. DIRITA: I don't know if he's there.

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Yes, he has arrived. He just got there and he's just started his mission.

MR. DIRITA: Good.

Q Is there any schedule as to when he's going to report back, at this stage?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: We estimate he'll be back in a couple of weeks. But as far as the report, I don't know that information.

Q Larry, the other day the secretary said --

MR. DIRITA: How about we give somebody else a chance and we'll come back?

Q Just same topic. General Luck -- the other day, the secretary said it was over security in Iraq, not security forces. Was that a misstatement or -- ?

MR. DIRITA: I would just call that a shorthand for security forces, because that's certainly what he intended to say.

Q I have a follow-up on the budget, this time with a number. The original plan was February 7th for release. Is that still a firm date or -- ?

MR. DIRITA: It's not a decision that comes out of this department, so I couldn't say.

Q You haven't heard --

MR. DIRITA: It's the president's budget.

Q Okay. You haven't heard of any changes or anything?

MR. DIRITA: It's the president's budget and he'll submit it when it's ready.

Q Will you all have the usual briefing here?

MR. DIRITA: Yeah. When it's appropriate to do so, we'll discuss it and talk about what the key elements of it are and what the general thrust of it is. I think we've even discussed a little bit of that, just the general thrust of things. But --

Q Can we get a copy of General Luck's like mission statement, the tasking letter that he got that describes what it is that he'll be looking at?

MR. DIRITA: I don't know. What he's done is develop his own concept of what he's working, on based

on his discussions with the chairman and the secretary, and perhaps other commanders in the region. I don't know if that's something we would release, but we might be prepared to talk about it in more detail. I haven't seen it. So --

Q It would be great to see that.

MR. DIRITA: It would, wouldn't it.

Q Yes. (Laughter.)

MR. DIRITA: Maybe we have time for one or two.

Q Do you know when the Church report, the Jacoby report and the Formica reports will be released?

MR. DIRITA: I do not. I know that the Formica report is more or less complete. I understand General Casey has concluded his review of it. There's been one briefing of it provided to the secretary within the last few days. We're developing some final -- General Formica and the Joint Staff are developing some final pieces of that report, and when we've got something to discuss, we will. But it's getting close. I would say it's very close.

The same with Admiral Church. His preliminary report was distributed around the department for people to comment and evaluate and make sure -- he was very eager to get people who have maybe a different slice of it to weigh in. I think that process is complete and he's trying to assemble his final conclusions.

It's important to emphasize that his final conclusions will be final conclusions of what he looked at, but I think we've tried to be very clear that we expect that there will be further announcements regarding detainee operations involving abuse allegations. We know, for example, that there's a continuing document review and release being done under the guidance of a court order. Much of that has tended to be documentation involving things we've already investigated, but we'll always do our best to try and catch up and make sure that we can provide clarification.

But the end of these reports is not the end of news on these issues, because it's an ongoing activity. There are a number of investigations that will continue, individual investigations, not so much these overview investigations. So it's worth knowing that even when the -- Jacoby, I'm not sure we'll have much more on Jacoby. If I'm not mistaken -- was that briefed in the theater? Do we know? I don't.

STAFF: It has not yet been.

MR. DIRITA: It hasn't been. Okay. I understand the Jacoby report is concluded, and I'll get an answer for you. We'll try and provide some detail as to when that might be briefed.

Last question? Does that work? Yes, ma'am?

Q Larry, you had mentioned that it seems like there's not a connection between the test in December, the missile defense test, and any either decision or backing away from a 2004 operational date. Was there anything else that contributed to the fact that we didn't hear that the system is operational at the end of last year? Was there another factor that contributed to backing off of that?

MR. DIRITA: I'm not sure I accept your characterization that we don't care. This was an important system --

Q I didn't say you didn't care.

MR. DIRITA: I thought you said that. Maybe I misunderstood you.

Q Did I?! I --

MR. DIRITA: What did you say, "didn't declare," maybe? I'm sorry, I just didn't hear.

(Cross-talk and laughter among the press.)

Q We know you care!

Q Maybe you didn't declare because you don't care. (Laughter.)

MR. DIRITA: Well, again, the test was not related to that. The test was a test to test various things. I think we discussed it in detail; not necessarily General Rodriguez and I, but there were briefs provided for it.

And I guess your question was were there other factors that had to do with --

Q That led to the fact that there wasn't a declaration of some sort of operational capability.

MR. DIRITA: I don't think that the goal was ever that we would declare it was operational. I think the goal was that there would be an operational capability by the end of 2004.

Q I thought that was always sort of the stated goal.

MR. DIRITA: That we would declare something?

(Cross talk.)

Q It was early -- early in the phase of operations --

MR. DIRITA: That we would declare something, or -- well, they may have had some internal milestone of their own.

(Cross talk.)

Q (Off mike) -- an announcement made.

MR. DIRITA: I understand. They may have had -- there may have been some internal milestone for the Missile Defense Agency, but the objective that has been set as a matter of national policy as expressed by the president of the United States is a desire to have an operational capability by the end of 2004. We haven't made a declaration that we are now hereby operational. I don't know that such a declaration will ever be made. But we have a nascent operational capability. That is what I've described and what General Obering apparently talked about yesterday, and we'll continue to improve upon that while we mostly focus on testing and evaluation of this system.

Q I don't understand how you can say the two issues are not related.

MR. DIRITA: What two issues?

Q I mean, the simple fact is you failed -- you may know whether -- I mean, the issue of whether or not

you declared this thing operational and that test. I mean, the fact is you failed to shoot down a missile. Had that been a Korean missile headed for L.A., I mean --

MR. DIRITA: As was described when we did that test, what I understand is that had that been an operational exercise, the intercept vehicle, the intercept missile, would have -- having failed, would have rolled over to another interceptor. There are now more than one interceptors in the ground. The system was not configured for that operational mode. If it had been operational, it would have, in theory -- I mean, again, things fail, but in theory, operationally it would have said not ready to go, it rolls to the next missile, which is a common practice for these kinds of missile systems.

Q You said that -- the department said that at the end of -- or MDA said the end of December 2004 there would be an operational capability.

MR. DIRITA: I don't know. Somebody else said that. I didn't say that.

Q That is -- it was December 2004. Is there or is there not an operational capability?

MR. DIRITA: I think I just don't need to expand on what I've said.

Q (Laughs.)

MR. DIRITA: We can go back. And there's a transcript of this by tomorrow and you can look at exactly what I said, and I doubt I can improve upon it.

Q Well, you did say it was nascent capability.

MR. DIRITA: Right.

Q Is that nascent capability satisfying national policy as stated by the president?

MR. DIRITA: The system is what it is, and it will get better over time. And I know that there's a desire because it's -- typically the way acquisitions systems work is 20 or 30 years ago we come up with an idea and 20 or 30 years later you have an operational capability. We've decided to take a different approach on this, as we have with other systems, which is something known, as I think somebody said, spiral development. You'll have some capability. It's limited. It's not what everybody wishes it may be, perhaps. But some capability exists while you continue to improve upon the capability of that system.

I think that's exactly the way this system currently stands. Some capability exists, it will continue to improve as we continue to test it, and the testing is, at the moment, a higher priority.

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