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

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DoD News Briefing

MR. DI RITA: Good afternoon. I thought it would be helpful to maybe come down and spend a little time with you today. We've had a rather busy couple of weeks. The secretary was obviously in Europe two weeks ago and then in Iraq for the day and then back last week, where had the opportunity to speak about the president's budget and the supplemental before the various committees of Congress. So it's been a productive couple of weeks, and I thought it would be a good opportunity to just get down and catch up with you all.

General Rodriguez has a few comments, and then we can take some questions.

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Thank you, Mr. DiRita. Good afternoon.

Coalition forces and Iraqi security forces continue to maintain pressure on the insurgents intent on trying to stop forward progress in Iraq.

Over the weekend, in the Al Anbar province Operation River Blitz targeted insurgent strongholds, resulting in the discovery of several weapons caches. This operation is another example of how combined Iraqi and coalition forces are able to conduct offensive operations to disrupt insurgent activities.

We are currently in the process of redeploying those forces extended in Iraq in support of the January 30th elections. In the next few weeks we expect our force levels to return to the pre-election level of approximately 138,000.

And with that we'll take your questions.

Q: General, maybe a little procedural thing first. You've looked a little unhappy the last couple of times you've been up there, and just want you to know, we deeply feel your pain. So we talked to General Ham and the secretary and arranged to have you stay another two years and keep briefing. (Laughter.)

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Thank you, pal, I appreciate that. (Cross talk, laughter.)

Q: Are there any kind of talks -- official, unofficial, backdoor, anything -- with the insurgents in Iraq to try

to get some kind of formal cease-fire and perhaps Zarqawi out on a limb by himself?

MR. DI RITA: Well, first of all, we speak with a range of Iraqis, the military does in the course of their day-to-day activities. Obviously the embassy takes the lead in those kinds of activities, working closely with the Iraqi government. Ultimately it's the Iraqi government and the Iraqi people that are going to decide the terms in which people might become part of the movement toward democracy in that country.

Since the elections, obviously a lot of Iraqis who have been opposing this transition to self government in Iraq are, I would guess, rethinking their situation. The Iraqi people have demonstrated a clear sense of hope for the future, and that sense of hope is increasingly out of step with many of the people who were either on the fence or lending tacit support to the insurgency. So I would imagine a lot of those people are coming forward.

But ultimately, as I said, it's Iraqis, Iraqi government, that will decide the terms on which any of this happens. Negotiations aren't for the United States to conduct, and to my knowledge, we're not conducting negotiations. People come forward all the time and talk to commanders, talk to individuals.

Q: So you're saying you're not seeking out or trying to find opposition leaders and talk to them?

MR. DI RITA: Well, I think there's always a desire to try and give people an opportunity to end their opposition to the transition to Iraqi self-reliance, to transition to Iraqi rule. There's always a hope that people will step forward. And I think the people who are involved in this know that that opportunity -- the Iraqi transitional government has itself been doing its own analysis of who might be willing to end the fight and who is worth having those kind of discussions with. But it's not our place to comment on that, and there isn't any kind of independent activity going on either by the military or, to my knowledge, by the embassy. It's being done in close coordination. Any of these kinds of discussions are ultimately discussions that are going to have to be decided on by Iraqis.

Q: Larry, who would -- you used the phrase "rethinking their situation" -- some of these people. What types of people do you --

MR. DI RITA: Well, I'm not -- I mean, I don't have any particular individual in mind. I just know that there have been instances where people have expressed an understanding that the Iraqi government is going to happen; there's going to be an Iraqi government. The results of the election have been now made public, and the leaders of the various parties that have demonstrated their own support through the election process have relationships that are going to come to bear when it comes to seeing if there may be ways to reach out to people to bring them into a more peaceful -- a peaceful role in the future of Iraq.

But it's -- I don't have any individuals in mind, I just --

Q: I meant categories of people, like former Ba'athists or, I mean, former regime --

MR. DI RITA: Well, I couldn't speak to the details. I mean, I would refer you to either the Iraqi government itself or to the State Department. I mean, as I said, the military's responsibility is really one to -- they're out -- our military commanders and battalion commanders and civil affairs people are out and about in that country, have knowledge and relationships. Sometimes people come to them through intermediaries and say there's somebody that might want to come and talk to somebody, and sometimes the military can facilitate things like that. But there's no program of doing, program of that kind of outreach that is done independent from what the Iraqi transitional government and the embassy is involved with.

Q: Larry, can I ask General Rodriguez a question?

General, Operation River Blitz, we're told it's, as you say, in Anbar province -- Ramadi and three cities along the Euphrates. How does this operation measure up in scope to the November operation against Fallujah? What are we talking about in numbers of the 1st Marine Division and the number of Iraqi security people involved? And in addition to the dusk-to-dawn curfew, what else can you tell us about the operation?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: That's basically it. A dust-to-dawn curfew, which was put in there. And there's -- as far as the difference between Fallujah and now, this is one of significantly lesser degree, obviously, with both participants of the 1st Marine Division and the Iraqi security forces. But it's the same -- it's focused on the same thing, which is to get rid of the insurgents who are preventing security in Al Anbar province along those four cities along the river, which is why they named it River Blitz.

Q: Larry, can you talk a little bit about NATO's commitment to this training and equipping -- or either of you, actually -- how you think that that's going to -- what kind of practical implications you think that's going to have for the U.S. effort on the ground, if it's going to have any impact on numbers of U.S. forces over there -- anything you can tell us about how this is going to affect the U.S. role over there.

MR. DI RITA: Well, certainly there was a lot of discussion about this when the secretary was in -- at the NATO ministerial two weeks ago. It's an important commitment that NATO has made and is executing on. The secretary-general of NATO has spoken publicly about his sense that most of the NATO countries want to help in some way, whether it were bilaterally or whether -- or part of the overall NATO effort.

We're seeing -- certainly when the secretary was there, the ministers of defense were being very open to a variety of different things, ways to contribute, whether it were trainers, whether it were making facilities in their own countries available to Iraqi officers or noncommissioned officers for training purposes, financial support for education of officers abroad, that sort of thing. So I think everybody feels as those it's been a remarkably successful initiative, that NATO is trying to be very innovative to see if there's a variety of ways that can -- that they can help.

I'm not sure that it's the kinds of activities that can be directly linked to the level of U.S. forces in Iraq. What they're doing is providing -- the secretary has often talked about, if you will, the rib cage, the kind of noncommissioned officer training, junior officer training, staff college type training -- that's the intangible capabilities that a security force has to have. And over time, that's the kind of thing that the efforts that NATO is providing can help offer.

I don't know if there's more that you wanted to add to that.

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: No, that's good.

Q: Larry, during testimony last week on Capitol Hill, some members of Congress expressed frustration that Secretary Rumsfeld was unwilling to share intelligence estimates of the size of the insurgency in Iraq. He said he didn't have confidence in those numbers. Have you -- he did, however, agree to provide them with some information. Have you provided an estimate of the size of the insurgency to Congress, and has it been declassified and can you share it with us?

MR. DI RITA: Nothing's been declassified, to my knowledge.

I think I'd like to re-characterize a little bit that what the secretary -- when he talked about the uncertainty about the numbers, he was reflecting the analysis, which itself says that the numbers are uncertain. So the individual intelligence community agencies that are making these assessments preface most of their assessments by saying it's a very difficult thing to measure. So the secretary was simply reflecting the uncertainty that's inherent in the analysis. It's not his own personal uncertainty. He's not -- he doesn't have -- he also says that he has no independent means to assess the size of the insurgency. He bases it on the

intelligence that's available, and the intelligence that's available is inherently -- is expressed by the intelligence agencies as difficult to pin down.

With respect to whether we've provided anything, what I think he said was we'd be willing to discuss with the committees the proper way to get the committees access to that, whether it would be provide copies of those intelligence assessments to the committees that they could keep for themselves. I don't believe we've done that yet. I don't know that for sure. It's not all -- and the intelligence assessments aren't DOD intelligence assessments, so it's not necessarily something that we could just decide on our own. And I think the way it would happen is we'd work with the -- inside the intelligence community to make that kind of an offer. We have -- the intelligence community has a very good relationship with the committees of Congress, so I would imagine it's something that could easily be arranged. To my knowledge, it has not been arranged.

Q: I mean, the point of several members of Congress was that the American public ought to be -- have some idea of the size, the nature, the scope of the enemy as it's being fought in Iraq, and that that information, with whatever caveats are appropriate, ought to be made public. Are you going to make it public?

MR. DI RITA: Well, it's classified information, and it wouldn't be ours to declassify I guess is -- it's not DOD information, so it -- I would just refer you to the agencies that have -- you know, and it's the CIA, it's other intelligence components.

Q: The other question that Secretary Rumsfeld and General Myers were asked and agreed to provide an answer to on the record was -- several members of Congress asked if there were any allegations of U.S. service members raping Iraqi women in among all the investigations of possible abuse in Iraq. Both General Myers and Secretary Rumsfeld said they didn't have an answer handy and they would provide an answer. Can you provide an answer now to that?

MR. DI RITA: I could not. We'll get the information. Subsequent to that hearing, and it was an exchange in the Senate Armed Services Committee -- the short answer is, to the best of my recollection from what we discovered at the time, was -- and this was last week, during the hearing or after the hearing -- there have been allegations involving untoward behavior by U.S. or coalition forces toward Iraqi citizens that, I believe, in every case could not be substantiated, but were investigated, and I think we have some numbers that we can provide to you. It's a small number, but obviously each of these is taken very seriously. The secretary has established, I think, a very clear zero-tolerance policy toward that kind of behavior. But to the best of my recollection -- and we'll provide what we provide -- what we've compiled after that hearing -- none of the specific allegations could be substantiated.

Q: Larry? Larry?

Q: Larry, a question about the budget? Thanks.

Several members of Congress have been less than thrilled with the supplemental appropriations process, and it's not that they they begrudge the money so much as they would like to see it be brought into the budget process. There's been talk from some of the Democrats of trying to build in money to the 2006 budget to sort of get ahead of any sort of supplemental request next year, which everyone expects. Would y'all support -- if Congress were to wish to do it that way and go ahead and start building that money in now, would you go along with that as a way of getting the same amount of money, or do you have a problem with the process as well?

MR. DI RITA: Well, it's not a process over which the Department of Defense has a lot of control. It's a process that -- once the president submits the request, it's a process that tends to take place between the Office of Management and Budget, the various committees. The secretary laid out the requirements as established by

the process that we have to determine what our budget request is. How that gets disposed of by the Congress is really ultimately the Congress's decision. But the Congress tends to work very closely with the Office of Management and Budget, and it's less -- one of the principle objectives of the money in the supplemental is that it be available as soon as it can be made available. And I think that the chairman and the secretary both talked about the importance of seeing that money as we get into the springtime. So I don't know how much of that obviously could not be put into the '06 budget, because the '06 budget is very likely not to be passed until the fall, I think, to be optimistic.

Q: But if you're expecting another supplemental next year, what about building, say, another $25 (billion) or $30 billion into the '06 budget resolution to kind of get out in front of the supplemental that everybody expects?

MR. DI RITA: Well, and I would just say that those are decisions -- the Budget Committee's going to have a view. It passes a budget resolution, usually. And it would just be, I think, based on what Congress is able to agree in its own process and in its consultations with the Office of Management and Budget. It's not for us to have an opinion on those kinds of things.

Q: Larry, I gather from what you were saying earlier about contacts with insurgents that there have been contacts with insurgent -- leaders of insurgent groups who are now interested in joining the political process. Is that --

MR. DI RITA: I'm not aware of that. I -- nothing I said was intended to leave that impression. What I've said is that ultimately it's going to be Iraqis who determine what happens to other Iraqis who have been opposing the Iraqi government.

What I do know is that our forces are out. They frequently hear from people who say, "I know somebody who would like to talk to somebody else," and we do our best to ensure that that gets to the people that can make those representations. But it's the Iraqi government and the embassy. It's not the U.S. military.

Q: Is that then what you were saying -- people are --

MR. DI RITA: I'm not aware that any insurgent leaders have come forward through any channel and said, "I'm prepared to join the" -- you know --

Q: (Off mike.)

MR. DI RITA: Yeah, I'm not aware of that. It may have. I just don't know.

Q: Larry?

MR. DI RITA: Yes, Tom?

Q: Last autumn the secretary traveled to Central America, and while in Nicaragua, he secured a promise from the president to destroy their arsenal of Soviet-era MANPADS, which, of course, are a real threat to commercial traffic and are sought by terrorists. There's wire stories out of the region today saying that a U.S. delegation is in Nicaragua, angry that that promise has not been kept. Can you bring us up to date on what's going on and what is the message of the U.S. government?

MR. DI RITA: I cannot. I recall that there was an agreement, but I don't know that there's been any change to the status of that agreement. We can certainly find out. Is there a DOD person on this delegation? Are you asking that?

Q: I'm asking that.

MR. DI RITA: We'll provide what information can be known. I just don't know that much about it.

Q: (Inaudible.)

MR. DI RITA: I'm sorry?

Q: Carter Marrar (sp) is down there, the U.S. --

MR. DI RITA: Carter Marrar (sp) is. Okay. Well, we'll see what we can learn and provide that.

Beck (sp)?

Q: Could you refresh me on the Pentagon's stand on the size of the Army? I think it's at 502 right now. Do you want to see that be permanent or do you want to see that go back down to regular 485?

MR. DI RITA: The Pentagon's stand on the size of the Army. The secretary talked a lot about it last week. The chief of staff of the Army spoke a lot about it the week before. The Army is going through a transformation where it's redesigning its brigade structure. We've talked a lot about it. At the same time, we have effectively increased the size of the Army fairly significantly over the last three years using the authorities that Congress provides for the emergency. And I think we're at the -- we're about 20,000 over authorized end strength right now, give or take. And it may well be by the end of the year I think the Army's projected to be a bit higher than that level at the moment.

So the general view from here has consistently been and it remains that we don't need any number in the statute because the authorities we have allow us to make the Army as big as it needs to be, and that the statute actually imposes some artificialities in the way that the Army has to manage people that seem unnecessary. As the transformation continues, as the Army reorganizes for this more agile and deployable brigade structure, that will have some impact on the size of the Army, but so will a lot of other things that are going on, including a discussion that the secretary talked about last week of converting a lot of military positions to civilian. I think over 10,000 of those have already been done or are going to be done. The rebalancing between the high-demand and the low-demand skill sets. All of those have an impact on the size of the Army, if you will.

So it's too early to say that—I think it's too early for anybody to say with any kind of confidence "this is the number we think makes sense for the baseline Army," because there are so many variables in the equation right now that it would be difficult to pick out one number and think that that would have any degree of confidence. And then when you do it that way, you impose, as I've said, a lot of artificial manning actions by the Army and a lot of costs that stretch out forever if you've got it in statute.

Q: Larry, what do you mean by that last bit? What sort of artificial manning?

MR. DI RITA: Well, if there's a number that the Army has to maintain. Statutory end strength is a number that's measured on the end of the fiscal year. So, what the Army and the other services has done is -- typically is they manage their force flows throughout the year so that they meet that number on that one day, but they may be well above it during the year or well under -- Navy has typically been well under it and then has to come up to statutory end strength in order to meet the target of the statute. So it's not an efficient way to manage those numbers.

If you just -- I think it's fair to say that the preference of this department is that there not be any statutory

end strength; that there be no number; that we be allowed to have the Army that we need and manage that appropriately. It's kind of a -- (laughter). You know, we've done that. That's what we've done effectively since 2001; we've managed the number to the size of the Army needed, quite apart from what's in the statute.

Q: General Rodriguez? Can you, General, update us on the hunt for Zarqawi? We often hear that the net is tightening, the noose is tightening. What's the latest with that and the top leaders in his group?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Well, over the past several weeks there's been several capture-or-kill of several of the key people in his network that I guess I would characterize best as the noose is closing in the fact that we've got more of his associates and people in the last couple of weeks than we had before. But as far as how close that means to them getting him, you know, I'd just be postulating. So --

Q: The people who are in custody, have they been helpful as to trying to track him down?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: We continue to pursue those intelligence leads with all the efforts that we can. And while I just -- like I say, we've gotten more people recently. And I'd just leave it at that.

Q: Just to clean something up, can you definitively say from the podium that the U.S. military is not operating reconnaissance missions over Iran with unmanned Predator drones?

MR. DI RITA: I can. I mean, I don't know you if you've got anything you want to add to that -- (laughter) -- but it's not happening.

Q: You know that Iran is out now publicly saying that they're seeing these drones. They say it's a U.S. military operation.

MR. DI RITA: I would consider the source and leave it at that. I mean, I'm telling you that we're not doing those kinds of activities, and to the best of everybody's ability to try and determine who might be across the government, we've been able to satisfactorily convince ourselves that it's not going on out of this department, I mean -- or -- and it's not meant to imply it is anywhere else, either, I mean. But it's not for me to speak for other departments. It is our belief that it's not happening elsewhere, either. Just not happening.

Q: Just to clarify, is the U.S. government flying any aircraft over Iran for any reason?

MR. DI RITA: Not to my knowledge. And let me just be very careful -- and I'm not trying to be clever here. I don't speak for the U.S. government, I speak for the Department of Defense, and the Department of Defense is not. And I would welcome you asking that same question for other agencies of the government that do those kinds of activities, and I think that they would give you the same answer. But it's not for me to speak for other agencies.

Q: But one would think you would have the knowledge if another agency in government was flying over Iran?

MR. DI RITA: I would not think that. But I'm telling you, nothing I'm saying here is left -- meant to leave any other impression but that it's not happening out of this department; to the best of our knowledge, it isn't happening period. So --

Q: Are you trying to de-conflict the air space?

Q: What do you think about the nomination of Mr. Ja'afari today as prime minister in Iraq -- and especially, as you know, Mr. Ja'afari has close relations with the Iranian regime. And do you think the Iraqi

election results are against the U.S. vision in Iraq?

MR. DI RITA: The U.S. doesn't have a vision for Iraq other than it be peaceful, that it be at peace with its neighbors, it not have WMD, it be whole, it treat its minorities with respect. And so far, the elections have indicated that's what most Iraqis want, is those things.

Q: (Off mike) -- Ja'afari?

MR. DI RITA: I don't know the gentleman. He has been elected by the Iraqi people on the list, and it's -- now what's going on is the give and take of politics. And apparently -- I haven't seen the announcement -- apparently one party has made its choice as to who it would put at the top of its list.

Q: Another question: Syria said today that the insurgency in Iraq is very powerful right now, and to reach democracy -- that's what the Syrian minister, Buthaynah Shaban, said today -- to reach democracy in Iraq, the United States should leave the country. What could you say about that?

MR. DI RITA: Well, it isn't -- what's happening in Iraq is the choice of the Iraqi people. I mean, they have voted now -- and they have -- with some sort of clear voice they want a future of peace and a future of self-government, and that's the path that is Iraq is on. The coalition will continue to help during that period for as long as help is desirable, and no longer. And it's difficult to determine how long that's going to be, but it's not based on a timetable; it's based on the objective conditions inside of Iraq, and those conditions are as I've described. It's a country that has had elections. It's going to have a government. It's going to have ministries. It's going to have, increasingly, capability of its own forces. And at a certain point of time there will be a generally agreed sense that the coalition forces are no longer needed, and at that point there won't be coalition forces.

Q: He said that the insurgency is very powerful in Iraq these days. What could you say about that?

MR. DI RITA: I don't think I have anything more to add on the subject of the insurgency. The insurgency is what it is. There is -- a large number of insurgents are being killed and captured. They are still capable of doing great harm. They're killing a lot of innocent civilians inside of Iraq. And it's my belief and observation, having been there quite a number of times now, that most Iraqis do not want what the insurgents want, which is a country that's thrown itself back into the Dark Ages.

Q: General Rodriguez, can you just tell us if there are any trends since the election in terms of number of attacks, the targets of these attacks, the focus of them, whether they're -- the lethality of them? What sort of trend are you seeing since the election, and how can you tell if you're making real progress in the fight against the insurgency?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Well, I think the chairman talked about it last week, about decreasing the capability of an insurgency over time, and thinks that we've started to do that in the past couple weeks.

As far as the attacks and everything, they've been down a little bit since the election. So while it's a short-term trend, I'm not sure that that can be translated to a long-term trend. But the attacks have been down since the insurgency -- or I'm sorry, since the election. Also they've continued to -- and an example, of course, was the Ashura holiday, which, you know, has occurred three times in the last 30 years, once right during the actual -- during the invasion, and then last year, and then, of course, this year. And we had -- while it was a pretty bloody weekend at Ashura festival in -- I'm sorry, the Ashura holiday, it was about one-third as bad as it was last year. So there's some points that you can see with the capability of the insurgency is looking at in the short term.

MR. DI RITA: Maybe a couple more.

Q: How do you measure one-third? How do you measure one- third?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: In casualties, both KIA and wounded in action, and the majority of them, of course, were at the mosques and were civilian casualties.

Q: Larry, Senator McCain was visiting Afghanistan today with a delegation of U.S. senators. He said that it was his opinion that the United States should have joint military -- permanent military bases in Afghanistan. What plans, if any, does the Pentagon have for permanent bases in Afghanistan, and are you ruling out that as a possibility in the future?

MR. DI RITA: Well, there's no plans. It's premature to even consider something like that. We are in Afghanistan for the mission that we're conducting, which is to continue to root out the Taliban and continue to help the Afghan government as it emerges through its own period of electoral process. It's just -- it's -- there's no discussions going on beyond that. And Senator McCain is certainly entitled to his own assessment, and he's somebody who has a lot of knowledge and pays close attention to these issues and we certainly respect his views, but it's just -- it's not something that's under consideration at the moment. It's just not -- it's premature to even consider something like that.

Yeah?

Q: Larry, can you give us an update, if there is one right now, on the number of Iraqi security forces? I know it's only been a month since the elections, but there was a lot of talk that more Iraqis were turning out at a rate of about 2,500 a day to sign up. Do you guys have any update right now as to how many are trained and equipped.

MR. DI RITA: (To the general.) You have something? Go ahead.
GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, the number trained and equipped right now is 140,000. Okay. And the recruiting continues to go well as they continue to go the recruiting station to build that Iraqi security force capacity. I think that's what's --

Q: How many are in the pipeline, the training pipeline?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: I don't have that number off the top of my head, but it's about at the max capacity that our trainers can handle right now.

MR. DI RITA: We have time for a couple more. Then we'll wrap it up.

We'll come back. Go ahead.

Q: General Rodriguez, can you bring us up to speed on the December 21st -- the suicide bombing at Mosul? We haven't heard anything about that since the horrifying event. And any emerging conclusions on the nature of -- who the suicide bomber was, who he worked --

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: No, the investigation continues, and I don't have any details past that at this point.

Q: Overnight the Australian government announced that it was increasing its troops in Iraq. I was wondering if you can tell us about the -- when the formal approach to them was and what nature of it was; how significant that is, given the number of countries ending their commitments in the coalition. And the Australian government said it was important because the additional commitment would reinforce what was, in essence, a

fragile coalition and that a group of Japanese engineers may have had withdraw because there was no security for them.

MR. DI RITA: I doubt highly that the -- anybody in the Australian government described it as a "fragile coalition." That may be your term. I doubt anybody in the Australian government described it as that. It's a -- the coalition is what it is. Australia has been a very important part of the coalition, has been a wonderful ally of the coalition.

And we know that coalition countries have to make decisions about their future commitments inside of Iraq. And some will decide, as Australia did, to provide -- continue to provide troops. Indeed, some may decide to provide more, as Australia did. And other will decide -- and some have already announced -- an intention over time to reconsider that. That's going to happen. It's up and down. And it's -- we obviously are very grateful for Australia's continued involvement in this important mission, but each coalition country will determine its own way ahead. And I don't know that a formal approach has gone to any individual country as much as there's regular dialogue with the coalition, and the coalition countries know what is -- what requirements there are, what missions are going on inside of Iraq and how they might be helpful. And then they make a decision, based on their own circumstances.

Last question.

Q: Larry, the gulag study came out this month --

MR. DI RITA: What kind of study?

Q: Gulag study --

MR. DI RITA: Gulags.

Q: -- about Americans held in former Soviet Union prison camps.

MR. DI RITA: Okay.

Q: Among other things, it says that there's never going to be a good accounting until they get access to official records. It also says that over many years the joint commission on this subject with the Russians has not resulted in that access. So my question is, what, if any, new steps is the department taking to get that access? And is it an issue that has percolated up to the level of possibly being a part of the summit this week?

MR. DI RITA: This is the first I've heard of any of that, so we'll just have to get back to you. I just don't know if I can give you anything new, or -- we'll see what we can get for you.

Q: Larry, just one point of procedure. Earlier, in response to a question, you said you'd get us the information that --

MR. DI RITA: Right. And I assume that when I say that somebody's writing it all down and we get it to you. (Laughter, laughs.) I won't tell you I wrote it all down, so --

Q: What is the means by which we will get that information? Will we get that today, or --

MR. DI RITA: We will -- Mr. Bryan Whitman has been duly deputized to make sure that the various things -- and there will be a tape of this, which we'll review later to see that we've actually provided all the things that we said we would.

Q: Well, in the old days, before the turn of the century --

MR. DI RITA: In the Industrial Age.

Q: You used to post the answers to these questions out so all the reporters could see them.

MR. DI RITA: Is that right? Well, if we can do something like that -- I don't mind trying to do that if we could. But that was before the Internet.

Q: It was the town crier. (Laughter.)

MR. DI RITA: We now have something called the Internet.

Q: I hear it's even better.

MR. DI RITA: Thank you very kindly, folks.

Q: The Internet would be fine, too.

Q: General? How many troops are in Iraq today, General?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: About 155,000.

Q: One hundred and fifty-five (thousand)? Thanks.

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