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Special Defense Department Briefing on Security Operations In Baghdad

To view the slides used during the briefing: www.defenselink.mil/news/Jan2005/d20050105slide1.pdf www.defenselink.mil/news/Jan2005/d20050105slide2.pdf and www.defenselink.mil/news/Jan2005/d20050105slide3.pdf

(Note: Major General Chiarelli appears via teleconference from Baghdad, Iraq.)

BRYAN WHITMAN: General, can you hear me?

GEN. CHIARELLI: I can, barely.

MR. WHITMAN: This is Bryan Whitman. I just want to thank you again for taking the time this morning to do this with both the Baghdad press corps and the Pentagon press corps here. Most of our audience here knows you, but this is Army Major General Peter Chiarelli. He's the commander of the Multinational Division in Baghdad and the commanding general of the 1st Cavalry Division. As you know, his troops are responsible for the ongoing security operations in the Baghdad area. He's here to give us an update on those efforts. He has some comments that he'd like to make, and then we'll start to take some questions, starting here at the Pentagon.

We can see him. He can't see us. So if -- when I call on you, if you'd identify yourself and your news organization that would help him out.

So, sir, I'd turn over to you.

GEN. CHIARELLI: Well, thank you very much. Good afternoon, for those of you in Baghdad, and at the Pentagon, I thank you for coming in.

I would like to offer some comments, and then I'll be happy to take any questions you might have.

I'd like to start by offering a word about the late governor of Baghdad, His Excellency Ali al-Haidari. The governor epitomized the courageous, pioneering spirit that is vital to the future of Iraq. He bravely faced the dangers he knew confronted him as a leader in the movement toward democracy and true freedom.

Tuesday lawless and cowardly insurgents viciously attacked him as he carried out his duties -- duties aimed at helping Iraqis throughout the city. He sought to improve every facet of Baghdad and worked tirelessly toward that end. He will not be forgotten, and the truth and honor of his message of hope will carry forward. It is seldom that you read -- that you meet a great man, but I can tell you, as a good friend, he was a great man.

Today we stand just a few weeks away from historic elections in Iraq. The choices made by Iraqis will set the course for generations to come. The stark differences the Iraqi people face between the insurgent enemy and the prospect of a democratic future are indisputable.

The insurgent or terrorist is intent only on one thing: the grab for power at any cost. The insurgent has no plan for the betterment of Iraq or its people. He destroys. He kills innocent civilians. He delays, obstructs and divides the people by playing on their fears. There is no glory or honor in what some call the resistance. What is he resisting? The Iraqi government and the multinational forces are clearly intent on supporting the full independence of the Iraqi people through a government recognized internationally. What is he resisting? Construction and repair of the infrastructure of Baghdad is under way, and the insurgent has attempted to be an obstacle every step of the way. What is he resisting? The government will hold internationally monitored Iraqi-led elections. What is he resisting? The Iraqi security forces are growing in size and skill, and more and more responsibility for the security of the people is coming from the Iraqi security forces.

Also important, why is the insurgent resisting? He is resisting the will of the Iraqi people because he has a private agenda and he is terrified of what the Iraqi people will have to say at the polls. He is resisting a safer, economically sound and free Iraq to protect his self-interest. He is wicked and he has malicious partners within the country and from foreign lands that do not care about the Iraqi people. Consider that Osama bin Laden, not an Iraqi, has laid the terrorist -- labeled the terrorist Zarqawi -- not an Iraqi -- an emir or prince of Iraq. None of these people care about the people of Iraq. That is their only unifying theme.

Ultimately, the people of Iraq realize this as fact. They will not turn away from a free future. The insurgent will fail, but he will continue to fight in the near term.

To that end, we have a message for the insurgent who attempts to operate from the area and disrupt these elections. We will find you, we will watch where you move, we will listen to you speaking to each other, we will fight, and we will defeat you. You cannot sleep, eat, move or meet without the clear understanding that you may be killed or captured at any moment. Cease your operations now and you'll be choosing to live. Cease now and Iraqis can join in the progress being made in Baghdad.

And while insurgent activity in Baghdad will likely spike as the Iraqi people approach their elections and the insurgents become more desperate, we will continue to focus on providing an environment in which Iraqis can conduct their elections without insurgent interference. In these elections, our role continues to be one of support. The Iraqis will provide security, operate polling stations, count ballots and announce results. MNF [Multinational Forces-Iraq] is not involved in the election process. With additional security forces in place in Baghdad, we stand ready to assist with security matters as determined by the Iraqi government.

As a continuing measure to support the Iraqis, last week we initiated Operation Triple Play in North Babil, using 1st Cavalry Division soldiers, Marines from the 24th Marine Expeditionary Force and Iraqi security forces. We are building on the momentum gained by defeating the insurgents operating in Fallujah. The insurgent cannot hide or depend on a safe haven for a base of operations. We, along with the Iraqi security forces, are conducting targeted operations in the area to continue disrupting insurgent activities.

North Babil was an area that had many Saddam loyalists, and of late has been a place where -- insurgents have used as a base of operations. Some of the terrorists who were in Fallujah relocated to the

areas just south of Baghdad to hide, rearm and continue operations. We will not allow him to reestablish his forces. We will pressure him. We will find him. We will kill or capture him.

This fight, though, is different. We face a violent, remorseless insurgent enemy in the area, but we also recognize that most of the people in that area want a cessation of terrorist acts. They want what people throughout Baghdad want. They want improved sewers, they want clean water, they want dependable electricity, they want solid- waste disposal and they want jobs. Thus, simultaneous with combat operations, we are bringing civil affairs specialists into the area to provide expertise in assessing and developing plans to improve essential services in that area. We, along with the Iraqi security forces, are foremost concerned with the people.

Finally, combat operations and infrastructure growth are not the only ways we will continue to support the Iraqi security forces. Most of you are aware of the terrible attack by insurgents who rigged a house in the Ghazalia area to explode, killing at least 29 innocent civilians, injuring many, and causing extensive property damage. This occurred just last week.

What you may not realize is the extraordinary efforts by the 1st Cavalry Division's Rescue One. Rescue One is a team we developed in late 2003, led primarily by reservists, many of whom have civilian- acquired rescue expertise. The team responded with their heavy equipment to the scene in western Baghdad in a very short period following this attack. At the scene of the attack the team -- two of the soldiers are next to me, both sergeants; Renko and Taylor -- worked for more than 10 hours cutting through rubble, organizing local civilians to assist, and pulling several injured and deceased people from the rubble. Their dedication undoubtedly saved lives.

This team and all the soldiers in Baghdad represent our unwavering commitment to supporting the people of Iraq and the Iraqi security forces. The terrorist insurgents who committed this barbaric act knew that they would kill innocent civilians. We, along with the Iraqi security forces, will not allow the insurgents to gain traction, and we'll continue to work together to provide a safe environment for the Iraqi elections.

Thank you. And now I'll be glad to take your questions.

MR. WHITMAN: Thank you for that update, General.

Rick?

Q General, this is Rick Whittle with the Dallas Morning News. And I'm just wondering, given the fact that the governor of Baghdad is not even safe in the city, it seems pretty clear that the people of Iraq will be risking their lives, at least in some areas, when they go to the polls, if they go to the polls. Given that security situation, why wouldn't it make sense for these elections to be postponed so that you and your forces could continue the sorts of successes that you were citing a little earlier?

GEN. CHIARELLI: Well, first of all, we expect the security situation to be better by the 30th of January when the elections will be held. There's no doubt in my mind that the insurgent will try to create issues with the elections.

But I will tell you that all our polling data indicates that the people of Baghdad want to vote. And that is the thing the insurgents fear the most; they fear the fact that Iraqis want to go to the polls. Our latest polls -- not done by us, but Iraqis -- indicate that over 80 percent of the people of Baghdad, even given the security situation that you see every night and report on every night, want to go to the polls. And there's a couple of reasons for that. I can show you a picture right now of the IED that took place yesterday. I think you all covered it, and it was a terrible, terrible act. It affected immediately the lives of about a hundred folks at the scene, and it created

an intimidation factor that is very, very hard for us to judge.

But the next picture shows other things that are going on in Baghdad that you don't necessarily always see. Here you see about 18,000 folks that we currently have at work in Sadr City putting in new sewers, putting in new electrical lines, putting in new water mains, picking up the trash and establishing. The next picture shows you folks that are improving the electrical distribution.

I've got 18,000 folks that work in Sadr City, \$161 million worth of projects. I've got similar projects going on in just about every district of Baghdad. And that's what's normally not reported every day. And I think it's having a tremendous effect that the Iraqi people here in Baghdad feel that they have hope for the future. And because of that, I expect them to go out in the polls in rather large numbers.

MR. WHITMAN: Pam?

Q Sir, this is Pam Hess with United Press International. You said earlier you won't allow insurgents to gain traction, but from this vantage point, the daily bombings that are claiming, you know, seven or 10 people a day seem like traction. Can you explain how -- what that difference is?

GEN. CHIARELLI: The VBIED is a vicious weapon, and when run against a stationary location it has devastating effects. And Baghdad is a city of 7 million people, and my ability to pull every VBIED off the street is at this time impossible. I will tell you we've had tremendous success lately. We have pulled up about 50 percent of them in the last week. For every one that you've seen go off, I've found another one or broke up a cell that is placing another one. And I think the Iraqi people, at least in Baghdad, understand that there will be some danger in going to the polls, but they also understand that it's their future and they want to get out and vote.

The total number of attacks in Baghdad has gone down, and I hear that when I'm in the streets. And I know this is hard for you to believe, but when you talk to Iraqis in the city, they say the security situation has improved since Fallujah in Baghdad. So I see a lot of hope on their part and a lot of work that we're doing to continue to provide a more secure environment every single day.

MR. WHITMAN: We'll take one more here and then we'll take some questions from Baghdad.

Q General Chiarelli, this is Kathleen Koch with CNN. I'm wondering what you base your expectation that the situation will be better by January 30th. What do you base that on when -- well, we've been hearing from leaders here at the Pentagon and at the State Department; I believe The Washington Post has quoted a senior U.S. official right there at the embassy in Baghdad as saying -- that official saying the situation in Baghdad has gotten worse and continues to get worse. And again, officials here and at the State Department tell us to expect increasing violence leading up to the election date.

GEN. CHIARELLI: Well, I think I indicated in my opening statement that I thought violence would spike, but we will continue to work very, very hard. We've had tremendous success down in north Babil. We've pulled up over 400 rockets that probably would have been fired into Baghdad -- we found in caches. We will continue to do that for the next three weeks. We've found mortars. We've found explosives. We've found VBIEDs. And I've got to believe that we are having an impact. But I too agree, and I said in my statement, that violence is liable to spike. But at the same time, we have some time to continue to work and we will continue to work to make it as secure an environment as is physically possible.

I think another thing that we're starting to see that you may not be seeing back there is the desire of Iraqis to assist us in this. Again, Baghdad is a city of 7 million people, and what I would like to do is somehow have all 7 million of those sets of eyes working for us. We've established a tips hotline here and we've had a lot

of success in call-ins, people calling us and providing us the intelligence. They can do it without telling us who they are, where they're located, they feel safe in doing it, and the number of calls into that line has gone up significantly. And I happen to believe, as we get closer and closer to the elections that will in fact continue to increase. But I cannot guarantee that there will not be any violence in Baghdad during the elections. In fact, we should expect there will be.

MR. WHITMAN: Sir, you have some reporters there that would like to ask you some questions. General, you --

Q Thank you, General. Colin McMahon from the Chicago Tribune. Can you tell us specifically what your forces are doing right now to prepare for the election? That is to say, I understand it's an Iraqi -- the balloting will be an Iraqi operation, but in terms of building or securing polling places, providing security right now, what are the preparations that you guys are doing?

GEN. CHIARELLI: We're working with the Iraqis right now. We're holding planning sessions. We're putting together the final touches on plans for how we will deploy both Iraqi security forces and U.S. security forces for the election on the 30th of January. We're training. We continue to train. We've had tremendous success with the ISF here in Baghdad, particularly the Iraqi National Guard. I think, as you know, we've got over 540 soldiers from the 1st Cavalry Division that are embedded in our seven ING battalions, and we are very, very pleased with their performance, and they're ready to do what the Iraqi government asks them to do on election day. But we are definitely in the planning stages right now, and that planning is going very well.

Q Thank you. Tom Lasseter, Knight Ridder. I was wondering if you could give trendline numbers of -- numbers of daily contact in the Baghdad AO, current versus any sort of past point? And also, if you could just sort of give a description of the security environment in Baghdad right now, particularly in light of the assassination of the governor yesterday, just sort of a -- from your eyes, how things are going on the ground.

GEN. CHIARELLI: Well, we're seeing numbers go down, and I hope you could even agree with me that the number of rocket and mortar attacks has gone down. Now one of the things that is real confusing here in the city -- and I'll tell you a couple of other things we're seeing.

First of all, we're seeing -- the number of IEDs that we're finding has got to about 50 percent, and that is a real, real positive thing. And that indicates a couple of things to me: a less trained individual that's going out and doing it, we're having some success in picking up some of the IED cells. But I will tell you, for every one of those IEDs that we find and from your vantage point, be it wherever it is in Baghdad, and the fact that many of you are not able to go out to many of those scenes, what you're hearing is an explosion. And we don't pick them up; we explode them. We go ahead and detonate them when they're out there. I was hoping somebody was going to ask me what the large explosion was that we heard here just about five minutes before we started this news conference. It was a detonation that we did of some explosives that we found. But we're seeing those numbers going down. We're finding more. I'm very, very pleased at the number of VBIEDs that we are beginning to find and some of the impact that we're having on some of those cells. And we're also finding a lot of the equipment that makes up VBIEDs.

The number of attacks have gone down since Ramadan; there's no doubt. I'm not saying they won't spike again. And we have bad days, but we have very, very good days. And I think overall we've seen a gradually improving situation when you look at total attacks. But that doesn't take away from the horror of the VBIED that went off yesterday or the one that went off the day before.

Q Steve Negus, Financial Times. With Fallujah no longer available as a safe haven, where are these VBIEDs being assembled -- what sorts of areas and how do they maintain secrecy there?

GEN. CHIARELLI: If I knew where they were all being assembled, I promise you that I'd pick up as many as I can. And I know you know that. We've had some success down south. We've had success all around in finding VBIEDs. And you know, it is a -- it is so difficult when you give the fact, again, that you have 7 million people in this city with the traffic of 7 million people, that someone can wire explosives and artillery shells under the backseat of a vehicle and have the effect that these do. But it's a reality, and we are working very, very hard to be even more successful in trying to identify them, but more importantly to get after the folks that are putting them together. Because in reality, once you put the suicide bomber inside the vehicle, it's going to explode someplace. We've not found one yet where we have had the suicide bomber in the vehicle and had any success. The suicide bomber is always outside the vehicle and we kept the two of them separate from one another. But I think the most encouraging thing I've got going on right now in the city is the number of people that are coming up to us and giving us the intelligence that we need to go find some of these things.

Q Sir, Gordon Trowbridge from Army Times. There's been some renewed talk in the last few days about the possibility of a delay in the elections. I understand that's a political question, but I'm wondering, strictly from a military standpoint, would it have any effect on the preparations that you folks are making one way or another, positive or negative, if there was a delay in the voting?

GEN. CHIARELLI: I haven't given it any thought at all. It's clear to me the elections are going to be held on the 30th of January, and all the planning, all the preparation, all the operations we're conducting today are based on that fact.

Q How many U.S. troops do you expect will be out in force on election day -- and Iraqi troops, if you happen to know -- guarding polling stations?

And with the attack on the governor yesterday, how did his security fail him? Or do you think it did? And could you talk a little bit about how, if something like that can happen to a high-ranking official in Baghdad, how are you changing the way you protect other officials or that Iraqi and private securities protect other government officials?

GEN. CHIARELLI: Well, please understand; the governor was responsible for his own security. He wanted it that way. He was a very, very good friend. He had his own group of bodyguards, his own equipment, and he asked that he be in charge of his own security.

There's an investigation going on as we speak, to determine what happened. But again, until that investigation is complete, I can't really draw any conclusions on exactly how it happened.

We do know it was with small arms. We believe that there was a possibility of an RPG being fired, but that did not have any effect on the governor's vehicle, as far as I know. As far as I know, it was based on a small-arms attack, a rather vicious small-arms attack, on a congested road in Baghdad.

Q (Off mike.)

GEN. CHIARELLI: Yes, he did.

Q (Off mike.)

GEN. CHIARELLI: No.

I can't -- I don't know this for a fact yet. Until the investigation is complete, I can't tell you whether or not he was in that car or not yesterday.

Q (Off mike.)

GEN. CHIARELLI: I do not know yet. Until I can complete the investigation -- I've heard some folks have questioned whether he was in his armored car when this occurred.

Q (Off mike.)

GEN. CHIARELLI: He was in a convoy, with his security guard.

Q (Off mike.)

GEN. CHIARELLI: Troop numbers.

Q (Off mike.)

GEN. CHIARELLI: Well, I can tell you every single soldier assigned to Task Force Baghdad will be out or supporting the elections in some way on election day. And I -- and that'll be in the excess of 35,000.

Q (Off mike.)

GEN. CHIARELLI: Well, I can't give you that number. They'll be in support of the elections in some way. But I promise you that we will be out in force, in support of the Iraqi government, where they want us to be, and in consultation with them. We're going through those -- we're working those plans right now.

MR. WHITMAN: We have a few more questions at the Pentagon, if you want to go back to here.

Q General, Rick Whittle with the Dallas Morning News again. I wanted to ask you: Could you elaborate a little bit on your statement that you're having good success finding VBIEDs? What kind of numbers are you talking about when you say 50 percent? I mean, how many have been found over what period? And to what did you attribute it? Is it better intelligence or some sort of technology? Can you just elaborate on that a little bit?

And then, on a more parochial note, could I ask you when the 1st Cavalry Division is coming home?

GEN. CHIARELLI: I'll handle the second question first: whenever I'm told to go home. We are totally focused on this election period, and we'll think about when we're going to be able to make it home after we get through the elections on the 30th.

The success -- I look at the numbers every single morning and I know what we go out and find. And without getting into a lot of detail on that -- I will not; I will just tell you we're finding them -- I'm always comparing the number of VBIEDs that go off in the city as opposed to the number of VBIEDs that I find on a day. In a week period, I hit pretty close to 50 percent. I was finding about one VBIED for every VBIED that was going off. We find them in different stages, too, because as far as we know, they're put together in stages. And when we find one that we know was going to be used as a VBIED, it's a very, very good thing for us. And that number is higher than we were, say, three or four months ago. We were having a real rough time finding them in the construction phase, but we've had some success lately, and I attribute it to such things as our tips line. We've got billboards all over the city.

And I really believe that there will be a point in time when the Iraqi people, just like anybody else, and the people of Baghdad -- and we're already starting to see that -- just say, hey, enough is enough.

You know, I have 35,000 sets of eyes out there, but there are 7 million people in this city and I need to get some of them working to help us and the Iraqi security forces. They call into our Joint Coordination Center that is manned with both Iraqi police and Iraqi National Guard. We take those calls and we action on that intelligence. And we've had some success not only in finding some VBIEDs, but we've had success in some other areas too; in getting some cell leaders and finding some caches. And the number of walk-ups that we've had, where we're working a neighborhood conducting a patrol, a walking patrol in a neighborhood, and the number of people that will come up to us and provide us intelligence, we've seen that number go up also -- not near far enough; I wish it would go up higher. But they're all positive signs when you're looking at the enormity of the task of 7 million people here in Baghdad.

Q Can I just ask him to clarify?

General, you're talking about Baghdad only, first, right? And secondly, can you give us just a rough idea of what kind of numbers of bombs you're talking about? I mean, are you talking about finding one out of two a day, or are there days when you find five of 10? What kind of numbers are you talking about?

GEN. CHIARELLI: The other day when we had three go off in Baghdad, I was pleased because we found three that day. That's the kind of numbers I'm looking at. And some days we'll have one go off and we won't find any. And other days one won't go off and we'll find one. I'm just trying to look at it across -- I look at the numbers all the time as we continue to work our tactics, techniques and procedures for trying to find these things. We've got great soldiers out there that are starting to pick up on what to look for. And without getting into those details, I will tell you we're getting better and better at it, not to the point where I can say we can stop them. It is a horrible, horrible weapon, and in an environment like this, it's very, very difficult.

Q General Chiarelli, it's Carl Rochelle with NBC. The pattern appears that the insurgents with their suicide bombers are targeting the Iraqi National Guard -- at least that's what it appears from the reports we see out of the area. Is that in fact the case? And do you have a sense of why?

GEN. CHIARELLI: There seems to be targeting against Iraqi security forces in total, both the Iraqi National Guard and the Iraqi police.

But what I think is missed back there is the fact that Iraqis continue to want to join the National Guard and want to join the Iraqi police. It's a phenomena that's really -- it is a good thing we see in Baghdad. Just yesterday I was out at one of my battalions, talking to a battalion commander who had just had 47 individuals who went through the screening test and the necessary test to become an Iraqi policeman, to go off to the academy either here -- the two academies that we have. And we're having no problems recruiting and keeping our units filled up, and that is a good thing, and it is truly amazing. They have the same kind of morale. They want to get out there. They want to do what they can to allow their country to become democratic, to allow folks to vote, and to end the insurgent activity and the terrorism that they see. So these attacks are horrible, but it has not affected the morale of those who would continue to want to serve their country in Iraq.

Q Just a follow, if you will. Do you sense that the reason they're concentrating on the Iraqi National Guard is because -- is it political, or is it because the security for the U.S. forces is so much better that they're not a very good target?

GEN. CHIARELLI: It's an intimidation factor. It's an intimidation factor that is one of the most difficult things that we have to fight. And to break that cycle of intimidation is, like I said, something that we're going to need the help of the Iraqi people to stop. In a city like this, someone sees most acts going on, and what we're trying to do is to create a condition that will allow the Iraqis to assist us, and again, using their eyes to help us find out before these things take place. And they are definitely trying to intimidate both government officials, Iraqi National Guard and Iraqi police.

Q Sir, this is Kathy Rhem from American Forces Press Service. I'm wondering, is there some kind of outreach effort either by you or by the Iraqis or in concert to, I don't know, reassure the Iraqi people or assure them, convince them that it's safe to go to the polls or that -- or maybe counteract some of this intimidation factor?

GEN. CHIARELLI: We are not involved. My job is to try to provide, along with the Iraqi security forces, as secure an environment as possible. We are not involved in any way in the process of the election, in any way. What we're trying to do, and the hard story I've had trying to get back to the States, is the tremendous reconstruction that's going on here and the hope it's giving people for their future. It is huge to go into a place like Sadr City and put 18,000 people to work, and that number goes up every day.

It is huge to go into a neighborhood that has never had clean water, has never had sewers, has never had dependable electricity, and to have people see it being run to their homes. And what people have failed to talk about is the tremendous success in Sadr City. I fought two terrible periods in Sadr City. We don't have events in Sadr City, or haven't had events in Sadr City in the last month. And we are ready to do the same in Abu Ghraib and are doing it in Abu Ghraib. We're doing it in Kadhimiya, Nynisayh (ph) and throughout the city. And the people that I see on a daily basis understand that and are seeing great hope for their future in the work they see going on.

I can't even imagine what it would be like to not have clean, potable water at my disposal, let alone live in a neighborhood that hasn't had it for 35 years; to live in a house where sewage is standing right outside your home. And we're going into these neighborhoods. And many of the folks in this room we've taken out to Sadr City to show them what's going on, and many of them have told me, at least privately, they cannot believe the change in Sadr City. And the same will happen throughout Baghdad as we put this rebuilding effort in place, and at the same time we either kill or capture the insurgents and terrorists that are creating VBIEDs like the one you saw yesterday.

Q Do you see evidence that this hope that you're speaking of counteracts the intimidation factor from the car bombs and things? Is it working? Are they getting the message that this is the way to go?

GEN. CHIARELLI: All I can tell you is that the amount of walk-in intelligence that we have in every one of those areas we're doing a project like that, where people see that their lives are changing for the better, goes up. All I can tell you is that we've established a tips line and people are calling into that tips line. All I can tell you is that we've got billboards all over the city, and I take great joy in the fact that I see the insurgents trying to tear them down, and we put them back up. And our goal is that when an Iraqi reaches that point where he says, "Hey, enough is enough," that they at least have that phone number available. It would be kind of like at home where you have the refrigerator magnet on the refrigerator that you finally pick up the phone and call that number when you see something going along. And the number of calls we've gotten has gone up.

Q (Off mike.)

MR. WHITMAN: Sorry, no. We've used up all the time that we've allocated for this.

And we know that you're very busy. We appreciate you taking the time today, and hope that we can have you back talking to us again very soon.

GEN. CHIARELLI: Well, I thank you very much. Appreciate you coming in in the early morning in the Pentagon.

MR. WHITMAN: Thank you, sir.

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