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Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs)

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**Presenter: Gen. George Casey, USA, Commander of U.S. Forces in Iraq**

**Tuesday, March 8, 2005**

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### Special Defense Department Briefing

GEN. CASEY: Nice to see you. Some of you back from Baghdad recently.

I'm George Casey, the commander of the multinational force. I'd just like to talk to you for a few minutes about the situation on the ground as I see it and then take your questions.

The last time I was here was about the 15th of December, and I mentioned that we'd recently completed our first major assessment of the campaign at that time, and we felt that we were broadly on track in our efforts to help the Iraqi people complete their transition to a constitutionally elected government by the end of this year, end of '05. I also told you that I believed this objective was both realistic and achievable, and I can tell you that, following that very successful election on the 30th of January, I'm even more convinced that that's the case, that our objectives in Iraq are both realistic and achievable.

The 30th of January was a great day for the Iraqi people, for the Iraqi security forces and for the coalition. You all know more than 8 million Iraqis exercised their right to choose their government, many of them for the first time in their lives. The insurgents tried their best to cause the elections to fail, but were unable to crack the indomitable spirit of the Iraqi people or the cordons of the Iraqi security forces. Stories and pictures from that day tell the story of Iraqis determined to change their future after more than 30 years of oppression.

One story that -- my command sergeant major was out, saw a gentleman coming out -- 73-year-old gentleman coming out of a polling station. They were talking. The man said to him, "Today, for the first time in my life, I feel like I'm alive." And there were stories like that from all across Iraq.

Second point I'd like to make with you today. In December, I also said that the insurgency we're fighting wasn't 10 feet tall. I said they were a tough, aggressive enemy, and that they were the same thugs that had oppressed the Iraqi people for the last three decades. And while they continue to murder innocent people and attack Iraqi and coalition forces, they also continue to offer no positive vision for Iraq. They offer only intimidation and subjugation, messages that are resonating less and less with the Iraqi people.

On the 30th of January, a day that the insurgents vowed to disrupt, they were defeated in their aim by well-prepared Iraqi and coalition forces. We took away their options and relegated them to drive-by shootings, ineffective indirect fire and a few suicide attacks -- none of which breached a polling center. The Iraqi security forces did a magnificent job.

Another story that didn't get as much attention as the election day, but I think it speaks both to the capabilities of the Iraqis and the ineffectiveness of the insurgents, is the movement of the ballot material. Three million kilos of ballot material came into Iraq from three different countries, went through four regional airports down to some 20 other places, into warehouses and out to 5,200 polling sites; was then recovered, brought all the way back through that same process, and it was not disrupted by the insurgents at all -- across the country. Again, I think that speaks fairly highly for what the Iraqis were able to do that day.

So we couldn't be prouder of the Iraqi and coalition forces' performance and we couldn't be prouder of the strength demonstrated by the Iraqi people.

On the election day, the coalition forces set it up and then stepped back and only came forward when needed, making the 30th an Iraqi day -- the 30th, as I said, was a great step forward.

Today I should also note that three of the four U.S. units that were extended to help ensure successful elections have redeployed, and the other units will leave Iraq on schedule here at the end of the month. And the contribution of those units was invaluable.

Third point, I mentioned the Iraqi security forces. They continue to get stronger every day. And the election success was a great boost not only to their own self-confidence, but to the Iraqi people's confidence in them.

Today we have just over 140,000 trained and equipped Iraqi security forces -- about 80,000 in the Ministry of Interior and about 60,000 in the Ministry of Defense. And today Iraq has more than 90 operational combat battalions in both military and special police. And these battalions are engaged in combat across Iraq, both with coalition forces and even in some cases independently without our support. And they are performing generally very well.

We will continue to build Iraqi divisions and brigades that are capable of independent counterinsurgency operations, so that the Iraqi armed forces themselves can take the leading role in fighting the insurgency, and the coalition forces can move to a supporting role. That will be our main effort here over the course of this year.

Fourth point, we continue to make good progress on reconstruction. When we started back in June, we had just over 200 projects turning dirt -- that's our standard is someone's out putting a shovel in the ground, actually building something. And those projects at that time were valued at about a billion dollars. We just went over 2,000 projects now, with a total value of about \$5 billion. So, in a tough environment, the reconstruction continues to go forward.

Now, that said, there remains much work to be done to build a constitution accepted by all Iraqis, to prepare for the constitutional elections, and to continue to attack and defeat the terrorists and insurgents who intend to unhinge Iraq's march to democracy. We're in a good position following the elections, but we have an awful -- we have a lot of work ahead to get to our final objective in Iraq.

Lastly, just a short word to the home audience here in the United States. You can take great pride in the performance of your service men and women in the months leading up to the elections and on election day itself. They performed brilliantly in Fallujah, north Babil, Mosul, Salahuddin, and Baghdad -- all difficult places where Iraqis took advantage of the security they provided to go out and vote. And these opportunities were provided both by the Iraqi security forces and by coalition forces.

To the families of the men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice, your loved ones were part of something profound on the 30th of January; something that has the potential to change the political face not only of Iraq, but of the Middle East. We thank them for their sacrifices. They made a difference.

So, to wrap up, we remain broadly on track in meeting our objectives. To be sure, the insurgency is still a force to be reckoned with, but it was not able to achieve its stated objectives on election day, nor was it able to hold its safe haven in Fallujah. We've lots more to do with both our embassy and Iraqi counterparts, but things in Iraq are heading in the right direction.

I'll take your questions.

Q General, I realize that you're investigating the shooting incident involving the Italian general, the recent shooting incident at the airport. But I wonder if you could tell us a couple of things. Number one, who is heading that, and how is that being structured? How is it being handled? And number two, are there any preliminary indications that the Italians had communicated with the United States and the U.S. military that she had been freed and was on her way to the airport?

GEN. CASEY: We are still working through the modalities of the investigation. Brigadier General Dave Vangjel will head our investigation. He is the corps artillery commander for the Multinational Corps. And we are working closely with the Italians on their participation in the investigation. I would -- given that's happening, I wouldn't want to go beyond that. And I have nothing concrete that I can tell you about the second part of your question.

Q Because the Italians have indicated that there was communication. I was just asking if there was any preliminary indication that --

GEN. CASEY: Yeah. I have no preliminary indication that that's true.

Q And is this investigation a joint investigation with the Italians, or are you having separate investigations and simply working together on it?

GEN. CASEY: As I said, we're still working with them on the modalities. The way it stands right now, my expectation is that will be a joint investigation.

Q General Casey, you just said, sir --

GEN. CASEY: I'm sorry. Just a second. Back here.

Q Thank you, General. My name is -- (inaudible). I'm from Italian publicity area. And obviously, my question is following the first question. You are going on with the investigation. How long time do you think will be needed? And what they risk -- what the military that shoot are risking now in terms of the job?

GEN. CASEY: I'm sorry, I --

Q What is the possible condemn (sic) that the military are going to face?

Q What kind of punishment could --

Q Yeah, what kind of punishment?

Q -- (inaudible) -- who were involved in the incident.

GEN. CASEY: Oh, okay. The first part of it, normally these investigations normally take three to four weeks to complete. And then secondly, I wouldn't want to comment on what the nature of the charges could be

because I don't have any specifics on what those might be.

Barbara?

Q I'm sorry. General Casey, you said, in answer to Charlie at the very end there, "I have no preliminary indication that is true." To be very clear and precise, sir, what, exactly, are you referring to?

GEN. CASEY: Charlie said -- Charlie, calibrate me here. You said something to the effect did I have any indication that --

Q Preliminary.

GEN. CASEY: -- preliminary indication that the Iraqis had communicated --

Q No, sir, that the Italians had communicated.

GEN. CASEY: -- I'm sorry -- the Italians had communicated something to us about the rescue. And I said I personally do not have any indication of that even on a preliminary basis.

Q So your current information, understanding it's under investigation, understanding it's a first report and it could change, with all of those caveats, at this point what you are saying, if I understand you correctly, is you have no information that any Italian authorities communicated with the United States about that travel that night.

GEN. CASEY: I, George Casey, have no information -- (laughter) -- about that.

Q Well, I'm just trying to be very (clear ?) because, as everyone has said, the Italian government has said that they did.

GEN. CASEY: Right. And I'm saying I personally have no information that that is the case. Okay?

Q Would it have come to you if there was information? Would you know?

GEN. CASEY: I would hope so.

Q General, the plane was at the airport. So someone knew that the Italians were coming to the airport to spirit out this -- the journalist and the security agents. Who was aware that that plane was at the airport?

GEN. CASEY: I think that's something that the investigation will sort out here.

Q You don't know who communicated that the --

GEN. CASEY: As I said, I don't. I don't have that information.

Q So you basically have no information at all about what happened here, about the airplane being at the airport, about the route?

GEN. CASEY: I have some information about what took place at the checkpoint.

Q Can you elaborate, please, what information you have that maybe we don't have?

GEN. CASEY: No, I prefer just to leave that to the investigating officer to put all this thing in perspective for you.

Q Well, again, do you have a better sense of what's going on, or -- I mean, do you know the answer to these questions, and you can't tell us, or do you have to wait for the investigation?

GEN. CASEY: In these cases, it's -- we normally give the investigating officer the job, and he goes out and sorts through all these findings. I mean, I'm sure you're hearing bits from all over the place. And that's why we do an investigation, to sort through all those things and tell us what happened.

So it -- Martha?

Q Sir, can you talk about, generally, at the checkpoints and patrols that may set up tactical checkpoints, if there's a consistent procedure and policy, beyond the rules of engagement, to let Iraqis know what to do at these checkpoints or tactical checkpoints? And again, is it consistent throughout the country? How do you, in effect, educate Iraqis or others who may be traveling on those roads on what they're supposed to do? I mean, it's a chaotic situation on those roads.

GEN. CASEY: The basic setup of a checkpoint is something that is -- that we have in our technical manuals, and they train -- the soldiers train on those procedures prior to coming over to Iraq. I would suspect that at the local levels they adjust what they get in the manuals to their local circumstances.

Over time, both through mass media and through just roadside signs and word of mouth, they communicate to the Iraqi people in the different areas about what the expected conduct is as they approach these checkpoints. And you -- if you drive around there, you can see Iraqis -- when they see a checkpoint or they see one of our convoys, they tend to -- they react to it. So --

Q We --

Q General, in the three or four weeks it will take you to do this investigation, the reputations of the young soldiers who were on that checkpoint are dangling in the wind. And I wonder if you could explain to us why it is that an officer of your rank, who is the commander of all the forces there, can't pick up the phone and in two minutes find out what the heck happened.

GEN. CASEY: I can. And I can -- but here's the deal. I can get someone's perception of what happened, and that's the problem. And what you need to do is you need to appoint an investigating officer to go out and talk to everyone that's involved in that and then give you a recommendation on what, in fact, did happen. But what you get is what you're seeing right now: a lot of people have opinions about what they think they know, and they're talking about it, and they don't necessarily know. They know their piece of it. And so that's why we do the investigation. And I know it's a pain in the neck, but we just need to, you know, wait this out.

Q General, aside from that Friday night and the shooting incident at the checkpoint, did the U.S. have any information/evidence -- were they aware that the Italians were, in fact, negotiating, in contact, whatever you call it with those that were holding the Italian journalists? And is there any evidence or information to indicate that the Italians paid a ransom for her release?

GEN. CASEY: You say "the U.S." Who do you mean?

Q The U.S. military, the embassy, anybody in Iraq, anybody -- any within the diplomatic circles, any in the U.S. government. Did they have any information that the Italians were, in fact, negotiating and/or talking to

those holding the Italian journalists? And is there any evidence whatsoever that the Italians paid a ransom for her release?

GEN. CASEY: On the first part, as I said to Charlie's question and Barbara's question, I don't have any information about the Italians coming in here to do something with respect to the hostage, and I have no concrete information about whether there was a ransom paid or not.

(Cross talk.)

Q But -- excuse me. If I could -- you said you had no concrete information, but you're hearing reports

--

GEN. CASEY: I have no information that I would --

Q Okay.

MR. DIRITA: Folks, let me help out here.

Q All right.

MR. DIRITA: He's not going to talk about it, okay? And if there's any confusion about that, let me say it again. It's a sensitive matter. It's a matter in which we all want to get to the facts. General Casey has his portion of what he understands happened and other people will have their portion, and I truly understand the desire to know more. There's an investigating officer. That investigating officer has been charged under statute and regulations to find out what happened. And we can spend all day with General Casey saying, "I don't know" -- "I, General Casey, don't know."

And you will spend all day trying to say, "Does the United States know?" And then you'll say, "The United States in the person of General Casey knows," and it's just an exercise --

(Cross talk.)

Q I guess the -- General, I guess the question is, have you not asked -- General, have you not asked specific questions? Have you pretty much said, "I'm removing myself from this. I want the investigative officer to look into this, and I'm just not asking specific questions?" Is that basically where we are here?

GEN. CASEY: I made some preliminary inquiries right before I left Baghdad --

Q -- but you can't specify, General?

GEN. CASEY: Which I'm not going to talk about, because they were preliminary inquiries. And right now we've appointed a brigadier general to take this on, and he's going to do it, and he'll get back with us and we'll let you know when we find it out.

Q General, the Bulgarian incident, soldier on Friday, can you bring us up to date on that? And did it give you, when you heard that report about a possible -- another possible friendly fire incident with another ally of ours -- did it cause you greater discomfort given the timing?

GEN. CASEY: Obviously the timing gave me cause for discomfort. I mean that's -- it's another unfortunate incident. Again, both the Bulgarians and us are looking into exactly what happened during that period, and we'll get to the bottom of it.

I mean, all of these -- every time there is an incident like this, we look at it, we look at the procedures that were followed. We use those to adapt our procedures, and we continually try to upgrade this so that these things don't happen. But obviously two things come right on the heels of each other -- it was troublesome.

Q Talking about the Iraqi forces, you said, General, that 90 percent of the Iraqi forces are engaged in combat with the coalition forces, and sometimes they are engaged alone. My question is: When do you think the Iraqi forces will be capable to work alone on the ground? Is there any timetable?

GEN. CASEY: There's not a timetable. What I said was that there are 90-plus battalions that are operating with coalition forces. Okay? And some of those battalions are good enough so that they can operate independently. But there's not many of them. And over the period of the next year we will work with them to build their brigade and division level command structures so that you can have truly independent Iraqi operations. But it's going to take some months for that to happen.

Q Question: Did the multinational forces question the half brother of Saddam Hussein, Sabawi Ibrahim?

GEN. CASEY: We did have the opportunity to question him after his capture.

Q What kind of information do you think he can give the MNFI or the Iraqi government?

GEN. CASEY: I wouldn't want to comment on that while the interrogations are still going on.

Q General, you talked about the Iraqi opposition on election day, said that they were not successful in their objective. How would you characterize the change in the insurgency since then? And are you any closer in defeating them?

GEN. CASEY: The insurgency ebbs and flows. We have sustained a very good level of pressure on the insurgencies, from Fallujah all the way up through the elections, and we continue to put pressure on them in Mosul and out in the Ramadi area, between Hadithah and Ramadi there. The level of attacks, the level of violence has dropped off significantly since the elections. Last week was the lowest level of attacks since April. Now there have just been some additional attacks today, so I mean -- so it ebbs and flows. As I said, they still retain the capability to do damage and to do violence in the Sunni areas of the country.

Q Are you any closer to defeating them, though?

GEN. CASEY: I think so. But I mean, as you know, defeating insurgencies takes time. The average insurgency -- the average counterinsurgency in the 20th century was about nine years, so it takes time to snuff out the insurgency. And also, I think you know, most insurgencies are defeated by political means rather than necessarily by military means.

Q Can I ask a follow-up question on that? Have you noticed any change in the nature of the attacks and the targets of the attacks? There are some people who say that they think the insurgents are going after Iraqi security forces and Iraqi civilians more because they're softer targets. Do you see any change like that in the numbers?

GEN. CASEY: It varies by day. I mean, just -- you look at the Hillah attack and you say, okay, they're going after civilians more, but that's not borne out when you look over the course of several weeks. They're clearly going after Iraqi security forces more. That's kind of a steady thing. And the attacks against coalitions actually have dropped off.

Q So you think they're changing their tactics.

GEN. CASEY: There's no -- no. There has been no substantial or substantive or major change in the tactics of the insurgents, nor the areas where the insurgents conduct their attacks. It's not growing.

Q You spoke of a political solution to the insurgency. What -- are there any conditions that the U.S. would insist upon for some of the larger insurgent organizations or groups to be folded into the political process?

GEN. CASEY: We will not -- we, the U.S. military, will not be directly involved in the negotiations with any of the insurgents. That's something for the Iraqis to do. What we've done previously about -- when people have said, okay, we may want to come in, we look at them and if they, for example, have been involved in the killing of coalition forces. We'd say no, we don't necessarily support that. So -- but there won't be -- there's not some set of conditions here that we're looking at for negotiations with the insurgents and insurgents' groups.

Q General, as the second anniversary of the start of the war approaches, what's your assessment of where we are overall as compared to where you thought we would be at this point? And if the elections were so significant as you said, and we've heard the phrase "tipping point," what's the evidence of that, with attacks continuing every day and many days' death tolls in excess of a dozen?

GEN. CASEY: The first part of your question; we're actually a little further along than I thought we'd be at this point. And I do believe that the elections were a major step forward. Now, whether it's a tipping point or not -- you said that, I didn't -- I'm not ready to say that. It's a step forward; it's a major step in this process, and it came off very well, from our perspective. So, we're a little bit ahead of where I thought we'd be. And I'll leave it at that.

Q So, the kind of attacks that we're seeing with, as I said, death tolls in a dozen or more per day, that's about where you thought we'd be?

GEN. CASEY: In terms of level of attacks, I mean, we are dealing with an insurgency that has sufficient ammunition, weapons, money and people to maintain a level of attacks of between 50, 60 a day in the Sunni area. They've demonstrated that capability. And that's not -- as I said, that's not something that we're ultimately going to defeat militarily. The people that are supporting and doing these attacks are going to be drawn into -- hopefully, drawn into the political process, and that will take some of the air out of the insurgency.

So it's a combination of the political, the military, the economic, and the communications that's ultimately going to defeat this.

Q General --

Q On -- oh, go ahead.

Q One of your earlier responses with friendly fire was that procedures are being reviewed. Specifically, have you asked for a review of the rules of engagement at checkpoints, given what happened? Or is that going to be part of this investigation that's now under way?

GEN. CASEY: That would be part of all the investigations -- of the investigation that's going on.

Q But you haven't asked for right now to make sure that in the three or four weeks that this is going on, that there isn't something that can be done today? Have you asked for --

GEN. CASEY: I actually have asked my subordinate commander to go back and look at all the checkpoint incidents for the last six months to see what we can draw from those to help us out.

Q Some people have said recently that the nature of the attacks, the nature of the IEDs, anyway, is getting more -- that they're more crude; that maybe the more skillful insurgents have been killed or captured. Can you talk about that a little bit? Do you see it that way?

GEN. CASEY: Some of our commanders have said that. In the run up to the election, we certainly were finding a greater percentage of these things. They weren't as artfully hidden as they had been in the past. And I have heard some of my subordinate commanders say that they were crudely put together, and they seem to have lost some of the expertise.

Now, you'll recall right before the elections we picked up one of the main bombers in the Baghdad area, took him off the streets. And there have been several other bombers picked up over time. So yes, they -- in general terms, they are falling off and not effective.

As we took a look at the election attacks -- because we said the elections ought to tell us something about the strength of the enemy because he said that he needs to go out that day and disrupt it. So we figured we'd see what he had. Well, we saw about 300 attacks. About maybe 70 percent of those were ineffective. And so what we took from that was -- you know, as I mentioned in my opening comments, drive-by shootings, ineffective indirect fire, harassment-type attacks that didn't really produce any effect.

Q What have the figures been since then? You said 50, 60 a day. Is that attacks on coalition forces or total attacks?

GEN. CASEY: Everybody. Coalition, Iraqi security forces, civilians, across the country. But what we see, if you look at a map of Iraq, the attacks are all right in an area from Mosul to Baghdad to Ramadi. That's about where they all fall.

Q And the effectiveness of them?

GEN. CASEY: What we see as we study these attacks, for every one attack, two and a half are ineffective. Two and a half don't produce results. So you get a lot of noise. Now it's interesting, and this is just my own perception, but before the election, that noise really affected the people because they had a perception of insecurity. After the elections, it's not having the same effect. That's just an interesting perception, phenomenon.

Q Can you talk about troop levels? You said that those that have been extend have been redeployed, three of the four, others will leave at the end of the month. Where will that bring you in terms of troop level? And you see that maintaining for how long?

GEN. CASEY: We'll be back to the original 17-brigade level that we were prior to the elections. And I don't necessarily anticipate that changing much for the next several months.

Q So 138,000, roughly?

GEN. CASEY: It will be ballpark.

Q General, you've been talking about the insurgency. What's the status, do you think, of Zarqawi's group, organization, whatever you would call it? How effective has he been? Has progress been made against his efforts? And any sign that he's gaining any other terrorist-type allies in Iraq?

GEN. CASEY: On the last part of your question, there are connections that we've seen between Zarqawi and other Iraqi Islamic extremist groups, Sunni groups, but no groundswell or major significant change. We've had fairly good effect against his network and some of his second-tier folks over the last several weeks. And so we believe we've kept the network pretty well on the run. Now, you know, you can still pull off a Hillah, you know, and we have to be good every day. He only has to be good one day. So I mean that's what we're up against here. And but we're -- we have a fairly strong effort on the Zarqawi network, and we expect to have some continued success.

Q Yes, I wanted to go back. You had mentioned about Iraqi troops, Iraqi forces that were trained, and you quoted a figure of I think 140,000 that were trained and equipped. How do you define "trained and equipped"? Because I've heard a lot of different figures going around, most of them far lower.

GEN. CASEY: "Trained and equipped" means they have been through an MNF training program and that they have been given equipment, the equipment they need to accomplish their mission. That's all it means. It doesn't mean that they are at some specific level of capability. We're actually now at a point where we're going to move toward that, where we will start developing status reports, or the Iraqis will start developing status reports for each of their units, much like we do for the U.S. units. So we'll start getting a clearer picture of what the real capabilities of these Iraqi units are.

Q General, could I follow up on that?

GEN. CASEY: Okay.

Q Back to January, about how the senior leadership was lacking in the Iraqi military, and how the -- how you had to develop that -- isn't that what the NATO mission, training mission, is supposed to be doing? And when are those folks going to start coming out of that pipeline?

GEN. CASEY: The NATO mission is going to form the staff college, the war college, and a Training and Doctrine Command, and there's about 100 of those folks on the ground right now. They're already starting to do that. But those are institutions, and that's a long- term institution-building step, so that's going to go on for years.

If I could, on the Iraqi leaders, you know, they just picked Iraqi division commanders back in late '04. On the 6th of January at Army Day they stood up nine Iraqi divisions. And we just last week had a division commanders conference with the Iraqi division commanders sitting right next to his coalition counterpart, and they had a very good session with those Iraqi commanders. So they're actually now starting to form their headquarters, and we're, over the next six months or so, I think we're going to see Iraqi brigade and division level headquarters coming more and more into the fore.

Q General --

Q Can you talk a little bit about the number of U.S. troops that will be embedded with Iraqi units? There was a number of 10,000 thrown out later or earlier this year. What's the status of how many troops will be embedded with Iraqi units?

GEN. CASEY: We're still working on the specifics of that. But across the country some units have already started doing that. You may know that the three Iraqi divisions that MNSTC-I trained had teams embedded with them already. And so as we look at the situation across the country, it's different, and so we're still working through the specifics in how we want to go about that.

Q When might we have some numbers emerging, though?

GEN. CASEY: I think probably the next -- next couple of months.

Q Quick follow -- quick -- separate question. Do you -- the September -- December 21st suicide bombing in Mosul in the caf(eteria), what's the latest on your inquiry? Do you have any emerging results of who the perpetrator was?

GEN. CASEY: No, I -- we don't have -- we don't have any more information on who might have done it. We do believe it was Ansar al- Sunna, but we don't have any specific people. We've had a couple of leads that we've tracked down, but I -- you know, I don't have a name that I can give you for that.

Q So the infiltrator -- somebody came in from the outside rather than someone who was working from within. Is that a kind of emerging conclusion --

GEN. CASEY: Right.

Q -- rather than a worker that was -- ?

GEN. CASEY: My recollection is that it was, in fact, an infiltrator as opposed to someone that came through. But there was not enough information for the investigating officers to make a hard conclusion one way or the other.

Q General?

GEN. CASEY: Yes.

Q We hear a lot about the Syria factor or the Iranian factor in supporting the Iraqi insurgency. But till now the evidence about their role is not clear enough. What could you comment on this?

GEN. CASEY: On the Syrian role and the Iranian role?

Q Yeah.

GEN. CASEY: What I believe about the Syrian role is that there are former regime leaders who come and go from Syria, who operate out of Syria, and they do planning and they provide resources to the insurgency in Iraq. I have no hard evidence that the Syrian government is actually complicit with those people, but we certainly have evidence that people at low levels with the Syrian government know that they're there and what they're up to.

On the Iranian side, we've seen different things. We do have good reason to believe that during the Muqtada militia uprising of last August, they were actively supporting the Muqtada militia forces. And you constantly hear stories about the Iranians trying to influence the political process in the south. But I personally have no hard evidence of that.

Q General?

GEN. CASEY: One more?

Q General? I'm sorry, General. You told us a few minutes ago that in the last six months you sent people around in the checkpoints to have a new -- try to look to -- at the rules of engagement. What does it mean? It means that you already thought that something wasn't going so well at the checkpoint.

GEN. CASEY: Yeah. No, what I said was I asked my subordinate commander to go back and look at all the incidents over the last six months to see if there's any lessons that we can glean out of that.

Q Why -- why --

GEN. CASEY: Because we've had -- as we said over here, we've had two incidents, you know, in a short period of time. And so it's prudent --

Q It's (inaudible) strange.

GEN. CASEY: Well, it's prudent for us to go back and say, hey, wait a minute, let's look at this and see if we can do something better. That's just the way we operate.

Q The same accident, then --

GEN. CASEY: No, this -- the Bulgarian accident is different. It's a different set of circumstances. But it's still a cause for concern, and so we're going to go back and look at it.

Q And was one of your concerns on the field, on the ground of Iraqi place, the checkpoint? The policy at the checkpoint was one of your concerns?

GEN. CASEY: I don't -- I wouldn't -- I wouldn't say that's exactly right. I mean, I would not have come in and said our checkpoints policy was a concern of mine. But now I've had an incident here, and as a commander it's prudent of me to look at it to make sure I don't have further problems in the future.

Q And the idea is maybe it's necessary to review these rules, or not? You work like that, so maybe if there is something -- two accidents in a short period of time means we ought to have a look and maybe change/review the rules, or not?

GEN. CASEY: Sure, that's exactly what we do. But just, again, the two accidents are different. They're different, different circumstances.

Q General, could you just clear up one thing? We've been quoting all weekend, since Friday, a statement that came out of the 3rd ID from the soldiers involved in the shooting that the vehicle was speeding; that they flashed lights, arm signals, essentially followed the rules of engagement. Is this something you can say you believe happened at this point, or is that something you totally want to stay away from, even that statement, and say it's still under investigation?

GEN. CASEY: Even that statement because that's one side of the story. And I think you read the papers, just like I do; there's another side of the story. So that's why we want the investigation to look at both sides.

Q Thank you, sir.

Q Thank you very much.

GEN. CASEY: Thank you very much.

Q Thank you, General.

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