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**Presenter: Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, October 13, 2005 2:00 PM EDT  
Mr. Peter Rodman and Director, Strategic Plans and Policy, The Joint Staff,  
Lt. Gen. Gene Renuart**

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**News Briefing with ASD ISA Peter Rodman and Lt. Gen. Gene Renuart**

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To view the report click here: <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Oct2005/d20051013iraq.pdf>

RODMAN: Let me just say a couple words to open up. You know what the document is. We were asked by Congress to answer a number of questions about how we measure progress or the lack of progress, and I think -- I just want to stress one thing. You know, we don't want to fall into the trap of an earlier time of thinking that everything is quantifiable. We know that not everything is quantifiable, but we were asked some good questions by Congress. You know, how do we assess whether something is working or not working? You know, and some things are measurable, and we do our best to measure them.

The report has good news and bad news. We're trying hard to be factual, straightforward, just lay out the data, answer the questions. So anyway, we -- and I think --

LAWRENCE DIRITA (Pentagon spokesman): Let me just -- stand by. Let me make a quick announcement. These guys will be on the record, I think. That's okay with you guys, right?

RODMAN: Yeah.

RENUART: Yeah.

RODMAN: It's okay with us.

DIRITA: My understanding is they'd be on record, so I --

RODMAN: All right. Great. That's great --

RENUART: I think -- (name of briefer deleted) -- was just saying --

RODMAN: Just to make a plug for the document, is that it -- I think it's pulled together a lot of useful data. I think for anybody interested in the debate, including the debate over Iraqi training, this lays out -- and I

think this is what -- I think what's new in this report is that it lays out the numbers on the Iraqi training program and the criteria by which we measure their readiness. You know, the -- levels 1, 2, 3,4 -- what that means and what progress has been made over the course of the year or even progress even since the July report, and that, I think, may be interesting to you.

General Casey laid out some of these numbers that you hear a couple weeks ago, so they're not brand new, but I do think it's the systematic treatment of the training program, how we're measuring progress, and I think it's -- as I say, I think it's the first time this has been laid out in a clear fashion. So I think it may be useful to you and to others. Some things that used to be treated as classified are now in here, including some numbers in different categories.

Q Can you tell which type of things that --

RODMAN: Well, I'll let -- Gen. Renuart talk, but it's, you know, there are different levels of readiness. So it's laid out, and I just think it's a good -- I think that is useful.

On the political -- we're asked political economic stuff even though it's not, strictly speaking, DOD business, but on the political thing that is discussed is the political timeline that your familiar with, that we were talking about. And the economic area, again, has some data. It mentions some IMF consultation with the Iraqi government, which is a new development since July. The IMF gave the Iraqis some credit for good macroeconomic policies and so forth, so that's discussed. It talks about the electricity and oil which are fairly flat. That's not, you know, going as well as it ought to be, but that stuff, I think, is less interesting than the security -- Iraq security forces. And there's some discussion of the insurgency, what we think about the insurgency. But I think, again, the training program is maybe the highlight, I would say, of this.

But I turn that over to Gene.

RENUART: I think it's important to characterize a sort of strategic center of gravity, if you will -- Peter really captured it -- and that is that we allow the political process to be enabled. And so the concern with security training and equipping is to ensure that we have an Iraqi military and an Iraqi police force that's capable of, one, defending itself and taking on counterinsurgency kinds of operations, but also creating a stable environment that allows the electoral process to continue to progress.

And I think one of the initial measures, as we prepare for the referendum in just a couple days, is that we have more polling places than in the previous elections going to be available for people to vote. We have a layered security plan for those polling places, so that you have, notably, Iraqi security forces, Iraqi army and then the U.S. and coalition forming an outer and an inner ring of security for the polling places. And even in the western provinces, predominantly Sunni provinces, there had been a concerted effort made to create an environment where they could in fact come and vote.

So we are pleased at the progress that the Iraqi army and police forces have made so that we can enable the elections.

Secondly, it's important then to create an Iraqi military that is capable of transitioning from U.S. and coalition-led operations in areas ultimately to Iraqi ownership of battle space and territory within their own country.

And in that regard, we have worked hard over the last year but most notably over the last even six months to refine the training process, to refine the criteria that units must achieve in order to be given more responsibilities, and then to put them in positions to execute and operate in battle space, initially with U.S. forces, ultimately to lead. And in fact we see areas of the country now where Iraqi forces are in the lead in certain areas of the country, with U.S. support, for sure, but not U.S.-led with Iraqis fighting next to them, but rather Iraqi elements that are out in front.

Portions of Baghdad are under Iraqi-led security and are doing quite well, and examples in -- places like Sadr City, which have been of a concern, are now much more stable than they have been. You know, in large part, the fact that you have Iraqi faces on that security force -- that's helping.

I think that in terms of the training of the Iraqi military and the Iraqi police forces, we are having increased success. For example, things like the accession -- the attrition during training -- you know, in a normal basic training in various nations, you have people who come in and choose to not complete training, and so it's normal to see some attrition. The attrition numbers that we're seeing are not out of line with what many western militaries see -- you know, in the 10, 12, 15, 20 percent outside. Those are pretty good numbers in terms of starting, and most notably what we're seeing is that force stay stable once those units are fielded. And we're not seeing the kind of attrition of trained military once they're out in their units; they're staying in a relatively cohesive fashion. And their officer corps is much more capable of leading, and they're showing allegiance to their unit as an Iraqi Army unit as opposed to a militia, if you will, of a certain ethnic background.

Q Countrywide?

RENUART: I'm sorry?

Q Countrywide?

RENUART: I think we're seeing elements countrywide. Certainly we are more successful in certain areas of the country. We would like to continue recruiting more Sunni into the military, and there's been an effort to do that, and we hope that will continue to grow. We see indications that this is having an effect on the ground.

If you look at the 18 provinces in the country, there are four areas -- parts of Baghdad and then three provinces -- that are -- that see most of the insurgent attacks and activity. In the remaining 14 provinces, which make up a substantial portion of the Iraqi population, you see a very small number of attacks and insurgents. And while we should never expect that this insurgency will just disappear because elections occur or a new government is seated, what we're seeing is, as you can infuse more Iraqi-led security into regions, that people -- the confidence of the people is high that those security forces are there for a good purpose, and that they're having an impact. And we're seeing economic development, and schools, and all of those things that portend to progress in an economy and in a nation-state beginning to happen in an increasing rate in a number of places.

The numbers of Iraqi security forces that are capable, that are out there no -- you know, when this report was actually published -- was put together, the cutoff information showed about 192,000 both Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior. In fact, as we move towards the election this week, we see that number really closer towards 199,000 or 200,000, give or take 1,000 or 2,000. But -- so that progress continues. We're not at the end state yet. We want to continue to grow this force over time to create a credible defense capability for the country, but at the same time a credible police force that can handle internal security, normal beat cops that are credible and reliable in neighborhoods, and also police elements that can do things that we would normally see being done by FBI and other federal investigative agencies. So progress on that continues.

There are right now about 36 Iraqi army battalions that are capable of either leading in an operation or even being independent. But it's important that we don't -- that we focus on the metric -- that the ability to lead in an operation really portends an ability to manage battlespace in the country ultimately to accept the security responsibilities for regions in the country. And so we want to continue training our Iraqi forces to the degree that they can lead in operations, as opposed to requiring coalition forces to be side by side. And that allows us to then move towards a reshaping of forces over time. And we're pleased with the progress. I think if you look back, we began really assessing to this level of specificity and rigor back in March, and we've gone, in that period of time, in about six months, we've increased from 21 to 36 of those battalions that can either operate independently or in the lead of operations.

Q When was it 21?

RENUART: Twenty-one in March --

Q Of this --

RENUART: -- of this past year. March '05.

Q Oh, March '05.

RENUART: To 36 today. And in fact, I think the number, by the time the elections occur, may be closer to 39. I mean, they're -- so this is a progressive process that is --

RODMAN: And a year ago there was zero or close to zero.

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Well, I mean, I think if you looked at a year ago, we certainly had a number of Iraqi soldiers, but they were not assessed to this level of vetting in terms of recruiting and training, supervision of training, and then assessment, after training was completed, to bring them up to a combat capability. And I think that you all would agree that a year ago, while you had a number of men under arms, you really didn't have any battalions that met the same level of training and equipment and capability that we see today. So --

Q Level two, by the way? Right? Is that what you're saying?

RODMAN: Two and one together.

RENUART: Yeah, I think -- I think --

Q One is the famous one, right?

RODMAN: Yeah, famous one. Yeah, and that's discussed in here, the significance of the one.

RENUART: It is important to understand that all military units go through a training cycle. And so no matter what nation you have, units that are at the top tier of training, and units that are in training, and units that are reconstituting. And I think it will be -- it will not be unusual to see the Iraqi Army do the same thing. As they go in and out of operations, they'll come out and reconstitute and retrain. And so their training level, effectiveness level, will go up and down over time. So to focus on, you know, some numbered level as a measure of success is not necessarily the best way to approach this because there will be a life cycle, a training cycle to each of those military.

Q What's the base number of battalions, by the way? (Off mike.) I mean, 36 of what?

RODMAN: You mean the authorized number?

RENUART: If I think the authorized number of just straight army battalions, I believe it's 114. And from that number, we have 36 that are at that level of operating in the lead or independently. I think, total, we have about 88 that are through the training to a level that we can put them out in the field alongside or --

Q That's level three?

RENUART: We're moving towards --

RODMAN: Three and two and one.

Q Eighty-eight?

RENUART: Eighty-eight is sort of all of those. They've completed training and they're out in the field, some fighting alongside the --

RODMAN: That's three, two and one all together.

Q Is 88 three, two and one?

Q This is army only, right?

RODMAN: Right.

RENUART: Yeah. I'm speaking -- and I should be clear -- speaking just of the Iraqi army. The assessment process for the Iraqi police forces, both the, you know, beat cop as well as the special police battalions and those things, really began in earnest in June. And I think the report talks to the numbers of those units as well. That process is less mature over time, but progressing in the same context. The same rigor of assessment is being applied to them as is being applied to the Army. And so we expect to see that develop over time in a fashion that will mirror, if you will, the process that we've used with the army.

I think a couple points to mention. It's important to understand that we're still in the midst of a fight and this fight is not a tomorrow fight but a long-war fight. You know, [General] Abizaid talked to that. Insurgencies don't just go away because you've created a military or even because you've elected a government, but it's going to take a period of time for this transition to occur.

Some of the measures of success are how well the people accept, A, the Iraqi forces, B, the coalition forces, and C, their government. And some of that can be manifest in are they telling you where the bad guys are? Are the Iraqi people tiring of people blowing up their neighborhoods and threatening their people? And we have seen over time, to a point where the numbers of -- I call them tips -- tips on bad guys continues to grow over time. I think in the report it talks about in August we had 3,300 tips, up from 483 in March. Now, part of that is confidence that something will be done. Part of that is action and responsibility on the part of the coalition to actually do something with those tips and show results. Part of it is identifying more with the electoral process and the transitional government and the potential for an elected government, and the fact that they want all of this to occur. And so I think, you know, you don't want to paint a rosy picture, but you want to be realistic to say that the indicators seem to be that the Iraqi people are accepting the process; they're becoming more confident in it. And we see that manifest in their desire to remove those elements that are making it disruptive.

Hopefully, the participation of the Sunni will be seen as a positive thing. I mean, there's lots of speculation as to where -- how the Sunnis will vote, but I think there's common belief that they will vote in larger numbers. That's a very good story. So, as I said earlier, our role is to make sure that we have an environment that allows them to get to the polls and exercise that right. So we'll have to see how that plays out.

I guess the other -- the only other point that I would want to make is that many will ask about what does the increase of Iraqi capability portend for U.S. and coalition force structure. And I think it's important just to make a point that there is established a joint commission; it is coalition- and Iraqi-led, that will assess a variety of factors throughout the country, both in the urban areas and in the province areas, to determine the rate at which you can hand over control, if you will, of parts of the country to Iraqi leadership: Is there a political process in place? Have the ministries been able to reach out into the regions and provide the right kind of government oversight? Are there security forces trained and equipped and present in the region? Are they believed to be credible? What is the infrastructure like in terms of the lines of communication, but also of energy and oil

movement and that sort of thing? All of those go into a matrix that will allow this commission to make recommendations to General Casey to say: We believe that it's -- we are at a point in a particular city or region, that we can hand over that battlespace to Iraqi control and allow us to move coalition or U.S. forces out.

That process will continue over time. The commission is established. It's working on the specifics of the criteria. And I think it will be something that we'll see become more a part of the process over time, once the elections are completed in December.

Clearly, now the focus is on getting the referendum completed, having our national elections, keeping stability as we move through that, and then looking at options for General Casey after.

Q That commission hasn't operated yet, right? They weren't behind the Baghdad handover decision or Sulimaniyah?

RENUART: No, these were -- the commission has really just stood up in the last few weeks. They have -- the concept of the commission has been active and working for a couple of months. And --

Q Who's on it?

RENUART: I don't have all the specific names. I'd rather not point anyone out. But it is made up of members of the Iraqi government, of the MNF-I, Ambassador Khalilzad's staff. I don't know if there are members of other outside agencies or not, so I can't specifically tell you that someone else is participating or not participating. But their task is to be able to recommend to both the Iraqi governmental leadership and to General Casey and the ambassador a process that will sort of inform decisions on handover of provinces, and that sort of thing, to Iraqi leads.

Q I understand the report says that while you don't expect the -- as the election and the referendum come up, essentially you don't expect it to, you know, end the extremist part of the insurgency; that you do think it will take some of the steam out of the former regime element, the Sunni part of the insurgency. Is that right? Could you elaborate on that?

RENUART: I would be very careful to not characterize any one event as changing the course of the insurgency. I think the insurgency is a fight that will continue, and I think both General Casey and General Abizaid have said that on a number of occasions.

I think that the elections, the referendum, establishing a constitution, the election of a government that will be place for four years, the agreements that have been made on reviewing the constitution to continue to bring together the various concerns of the regions of the country will create more and more stability over time. And with that, I think, more and more Iraqis will become both interested in participating in the process and disinterested in the kinds of activities that the insurgents are conducting.

And so it -- that natural course of events, I believe, will increase tips, increase participation in -- maybe even in the Iraqi Army, where you'll have more participation from the various elements. And that will all move towards more stability over time.

Our key, our critical role, is to continue to enable that process by keeping a good presence, not hastening any movement of forces until you begin to feel, with good confidence, that stability is enduring in a particular region, and then repositioning. And then -- is that --

RODMAN: Yeah. Well, let me add -- I mean, we shouldn't be trying to predict when some decisive movement is going to occur, but I think that we all know that when you're dealing with an insurgency, the strategy has to be political as much as military. And we think this is a strategy to isolate the extremists, to empower the

moderates. And you see the Sunni feeling the gravitational pull since January 30th and the efforts made in the constitution to bring mainstream Sunni into the game as a way of isolating the extremists.

So this -- the strategy has to be political, and we think a success of the constitution, another successful election in December, inclusive government -- all of this is a strategy, the right strategy.

And you see in Afghanistan, in, you know, somewhat different conditions, where we think it has had that effect -- you know, the legitimate government has filled the space. The Taliban are isolated, but they're still capable of killing people, and there are still going to be diehards maybe for a little while who -- you know, who just -- who hate it, who aren't going to give up. But you hope to co-opt, you know, mainstream folks and tip the balance over time.

Q You're not willing to predict that it's going to be a turning point for the insurgency?

RODMAN: One -- yeah, I don't think we should make predictions. I mean, maybe in the future we'll look back on this year and think that it was a good year. But I think it's just wiser not to be making predictions.

Q Well, one thing -- if there is a significant number of Sunnis voting against the referenda -- we saw a lot of talking heads over the weekend -- it could mean civil war. Can you comment just a little bit?

RODMAN: Well, I think -- you know, again, I wouldn't predict -- I think -- well, there are different possibilities. The constitution may pass anyway.

Q Right.

RODMAN: You know, the Sunni no vote may not be enough to -- and so there's a variation of possibilities. But I think that what happened in the last few days with the leaders of some Sunni groups may have reduced -- ought to have reduced that possibility, and you have a Sunni vote that may be, you know, split different ways. You know, we're hoping that there will be at least a respectable group of Sunnis who feel they ought to participate. In fact, whatever happens on Saturday, the next round of the game is December 15th, when, I think, again, the Sunnis who realize they made a mistake on January 30th ought to participate in the next round, which is the election. So politics is going to continue, and I think that that is a safe prediction, or at least that's what we would hope is that the political game continues; the Sunni ought to realize that the game still includes them, and they, you know -- we will be using our influence with all the communities to make sure they play the same kind of inclusive game in the election.

You see a lot of forces in Iraq already gearing themselves to the election. You know, before, you'd see the formation of moderate political blocks, moderate coalitions that are trans- -- you know -- ethnic, multiethnic. And, you know, we will encourage that process to continue.

Now, if the constitution is rejected, you know, the rule says they vote on a new -- you know, another transitional assembly, which starts that over again. But it's interesting; if that happens, you know, everybody's playing by the rules, the rules laid down in the TAL a year and a half ago. It's sort of interesting that -- I mean, you want to keep people playing in the rule-based game.

No, there's a variety of possible outcomes on Saturday, and politics won't stop -- you know, if the constitution passes, you know, the game goes on and we will still have work to do to help the Iraqis, you know, play the game.

Q Thank you.

MR. DIRITA: I think we may have time for one or two more.

Q Can you comment on the makeup, the ethnic makeup of the armed forces right now, and what that portends -- because this is basically what you're betting on to hold the country together. But --

RENUART: Well, I think maybe two ways to answer it -- two aspects of answering that question.

First, it is the desire, as you recruit and organize and equip the battalions, and ultimately brigades and divisions, that they are representative of the country, and that you have a mix of ethnic backgrounds in those units. I think the fact of the matter is, is we've had mixed success with that early on. I think, clearly, it was more difficult to recruit Sunnis in some parts of the country, and so we probably don't see, if you looked across all of the battalions, the kind of mix that you would ultimately like to have.

Having said that, I think the training programs and the approach of the Iraqi government have been very positive in moving towards that goal. As you look at the training curriculum for these soldiers as they go through, it focuses on creating identity of an Iraqi soldier, not necessarily a Shi'a or a Sunni or a Kurd soldier. And it teaches the elements of unit integrity and team building that we use. And the fact of the matter is we've seen very good results in the acceptance of these units as they go out in the field. General Casey has done a good job of attempting to balance the size and shape and positioning of his forces so that he reinforces that notion to the country. But the reality is there's still work to do in that regard. And as there is more participation in the political process, I think we'll also begin to see more participation in the defense process. And I think that's --

RODMAN: I think after January 30th, weren't there some Sunni fatwas encouraging Sunnis to join in the security -- (off mike). That may take time to show up, but that is obviously the right direction.

Q One more? Can you address the MTT [Military Transition Teams] a little bit? Are you satisfied with how that process is working, with the length of time they're spending with these units? Is it difficult to come up with personnel who can fill out the MTT teams, that kind of thing? Can you address that a little bit?

RENUART: I think -- and I don't want to put words in General Casey's mouth, but I think that his general feeling has been that he is pleased with the ability of the MTTs to have an influence on the units that are deployed out in the field. Creating those at the rate that we are creating new battalions is certainly something we continue to pay attention to because we want to have credible team leaders out there, mentors, if you will, with each of these battalions and ultimately brigades and divisions as they stand up. So for now, I think that we've experienced pretty good success with them. The focus will be on continuing to keep the quality and quantity of those teams matching the battalions as they come into the field so that we continue the rate of progress that we've seen from the battalions that we've actually had out already.

Q One factual question. How many U.S. troops are in Iraq at this point in time. It was 162 last week during the press conferences.

RENUART: I think -- I don't remember the exact numbers today. I think that's pretty close today. I'm sorry?

STAFF: One hundred fifty-six thousand.

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: One fifty-six? And again, you'll recall General Casey and General Abizaid both made the point that they wanted to ensure that as we went through the election season, that we plussed up slightly to make sure that we kept the stability the way we'd like it.

DIRITA: Anything else, folks?

Thanks.

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