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Transcript: Gen. Brooks Describes Conditions in Liberated Iraq
(CENTCOM briefing April 6) (9180)

In those areas of Iraq that have been liberated, "the good news is life is proceeding into a new state of normal," says Brigadier General Vincent Brooks, deputy director of operations of the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM).

At an April 6 briefing in Doha, Qatar, Brooks noted that in An-Najaf, children are now safely returning to school for the first time since hostilities began.

Coalition civil affairs units are traveling behind coalition combat formations and working to meet the humanitarian needs of Iraqi civilians, the general said.

"Their efforts are making a major difference in the lives of newly liberated Iraqis," Brooks said. "In some locations, our soldiers are facilitating the delivery of supplies, and that includes things that are already on hand in storage warehouses but weren't delivered by the regime...."

According to Brooks, free Iraqis are playing an important role in coalition humanitarian and civic work. "They continue to help us communicate and earn a high degree of trust. The teams also coordinate delivery of humanitarian assistance rations and the massive volumes of wheat and grain that are starting to flow in from all over the world," he said.

Unfortunately, Saddam's military continues to deliberately put Iraqi citizens in harm's way, Brooks said. As coalition forces are more freely able to operate around or within Baghdad, he said, "we see indications that the regime continues to put civilian and civilian areas at increasing risk."

He showed reporters satellite photographs of Iraqi military equipment, hidden in the shadows but still visible, that was placed within inches of residential buildings.

Brooks said this ploy "is another example of how the regime is more than willing to put its population into harm's way to protect itself, and its weapons, and its capabilities of continuing to inflict oppression on the population."

The general emphasized that coalition forces "will continue to discriminate in our targeting. We will continue to be selective and seek precision in all we do. But it is clear at this point that the risk is increasing to the civilian population because of decisions made by regime leaders."

Brooks said that coalition forces are conducting non-stop radio broadcasting over all of Iraq to give instructions to the Iraqi people on how to protect themselves.

"We explain to the Iraqis the types of atrocities and criminal acts that the regime is responsible for. And we're also telling the Iraqi forces that remain, specifically the Special Republican Guard and special security forces, that they should surrender, flee, or fight and face certain destruction," Brooks said.

Coalition forces, he said, are focused on attacking regime leadership targets, military forces, command centers, communications nodes, and all located aircraft "to break the military capacity of the regime." He

added: "At this point, the coalition can operate throughout all of the airspace of Iraq."

Coalition special operations forces, he noted, are conducting "unconventional warfare and doing more and more work with Iraqis who do not support the regime." In Basra, Samawa, Najaf, and Karbala coalition encounters with regime forces "have gone down appreciably while the support from the population is increasing."

When asked about Iraqi casualties, Brooks said coalition figures are based on estimates on "the number of (weapons) systems that we had involved and the type of engagements that occurred." At present, Iraqi casualties are estimated to be somewhere around 2,000, but he added: "We are not out there trying to count up bodies."

Following is a transcript of the briefing, as released by CENTCOM:

(begin transcript)

UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND DAILY PRESS BRIEFING
BRIEFER: GEN. VINCE BROOKS, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS
LOCATION: DOHA, QATAR
TIME: 7:02 A.M. EDT
DATE: SUNDAY, APRIL 6, 2003

BRIG. GEN. VINCENT BROOKS: I trust that everyone adjusted their clocks properly, here and in other places where the time zones have changed.

Good afternoon. Ladies and gentlemen, since the coalition's entry to Iraq, coalition forces have been focused on the objectives of the campaign. We're in the 17th day, and the outcome remains beyond doubt. With each day that passes, the coalition force grows stronger and more damages are inflicted upon the regime and its supporting agents, and with each day that passes, more Iraqis are celebrating freedom.

Our thoughts and prayers continue to go out to the family members of those of our fallen comrades who have paid the ultimate sacrifice.

The coalition attacked regime leadership targets, military forces, command centers, communications nodes, and all located aircraft to break the military capacity of the regime. At this point, the coalition can operate throughout all of the airspace of Iraq. I have two weapons systems videos to show you today of recent attacks that we conducted to eliminate the military capability defending this regime. The attacks were focused on eliminating threats to coalition aircraft and preventing the regime from using aircraft for any purpose.

The first video shows an anti-aircraft artillery system that is firing at a coalition aircraft. You'll actually see that in this film. And this target was west of Kirkuk in northern Iraq on the 2nd of April.

Now, what you just saw was two sets of black smoke. That was the firing of the anti-aircraft system at this aircraft that's conducting the attack. So, I would just remind that there are not benign actions that occur, these are combat actions, and our pilots have done very, very well and have been very effective. Let's continue with the tape, please. He won the duel.

The second video shows a regime anti -- a regime aircraft located near the al-Takatam (sp) airfield, and this was struck on April the 4th. And as I mentioned, we're attacking all identified aircraft, first to prevent them from flying for combat purposes but also to prevent the potential delivery of weapons of mass destruction,

chemicals particularly, from aircraft.

We will continue to attack the regime and its military capacity whenever and wherever we find it.

I also have two products to show you from recent precision attacks against assets of the regime. The first one is a regime command and control facility in Baghdad struck on April the 3rd. What I'd highlight on this one is that there are 21 different weapons that were used, each one of them represented by a blue arrow. One of the reasons why I don't discuss sorties very much is because we have the capability of doing some of these attacks without involving an aircraft at all, or we may have certain aircraft that drop precision-guided munitions that can find their own way to the target. So, it might be one or two aircraft to do these 21 weapons into an attack. There's a difference in our technology and our capability now than what we've spoken of in the past.

This is a pre-strike; and the post strike, please. Varying degrees of destruction because the weapons systems chosen have varying degrees of explosive capability, and that's by deliberate design. So you'll see on the far left side, for example, these don't appear to be as destroyed as others, but they're effective hits. In some cases we went just outside of the building to penetrate. In other cases, the buildings themselves were destroyed. You can see some that are shredded in this case. This was considered an effective attack. If we don't see something effective, then we'll come back and attack it at a later time. The second image is -- well, first let's show the split here -- okay -- the second image I want to show you is a command and control facility near Samanpak (sp) to the south of Baghdad. This was struck on the 3rd of April. Two weapons in this case. Post-strike. And the split.

As we are now able to operate around or within Baghdad, we see indications that the regime continues to put civilian and civilian areas at increasing risk. The following photo will show you Iraqi military equipment that the regime has intentionally placed next to the buildings of a residential area. Although it's a little bit difficult to see, each blue arrow points to a piece of military equipment that's pushed right up against the side of the building. In some cases there are multiple pieces of equipment. This is in a residential area. We don't know that these are houses, per se, but it clearly is a residential area. This kind of risk is another example of how the regime is more than willing to put its population into harm's way to protect itself, and its weapons, and its capabilities of continuing to inflict oppression on the population.

We, however, will continue to discriminate in our targeting. We will continue to be selective and seek precision in all we do. But it is clear at this point that the risk is increasing to the civilian population because of decisions made by regime leaders.

Our coalition special operations forces in northern Iraq directed focused air support against regime forces in the north near Kirkuk. Some of these forces, some of these Iraqi forces from the first corps relocated approximately 10 kilometers further to the south, away from what has been described as the "green line." The special operations teams with these Kurdish security -- with Kurdish security elements, maintain contact with the first corps elements and have moved forward in a portion of that 10-kilometer zone to keep their eyes on the relocating Iraqi forces.

Our special operations forces are positioned along several key roads, and this is to prevent movement of ballistic missiles -- we've talked about area denial out in the west -- and also to deny free movement by regime forces or leaders.

Our special operations forces represent a very broad capability and can be introduced into any area by a variety of means. You've seen some of those over the last several days of this campaign. The video I'm about to show you shows special operations forces conducting another parachute assault within the last two days to secure an airfield for future use.

(Video.)

Equally important are the efforts of our special operations forces conducting unconventional warfare and doing more and more work with Iraqis who do not support the regime, and this is an ongoing and increasing effort. The land component continues to achieve success. Our efforts to remove remnants of the regime from the areas of Basra, Samawa, Najaf, and Karbala are ongoing. There have been some encounters with regime forces in these areas, but the number of encounters have gone down appreciably while the support from the population is increasing. Some deliberate work by U.K. forces in the vicinity of Basra have clearly weakened the grip of the regime.

Yesterday, a patrol of U.K. forces near As-Zubair, just outside of Basra, came upon two warehouses containing human remains in bags and boxes. While an accurate count is not yet known, estimates would indicate that the remains are of more than 100 persons. Some have tatters of uniforms in and amongst the human remains, and in one of the warehouses there were pictures of executed soldiers. These remains are not from this conflict. They are from some other conflict at some other time. Needless to say, the site will be thoroughly examined, and we're looking for evidence of war crimes.

There is still a regime presence in some of the towns, and the tactics we see used remain the tactics of terrorists. An example of this is a recent action at an area secured by the 82nd Airborne Division near As-Samawa. And you can see Samawa here, just along the river line, south of Najaf. In this case, a company of airborne troopers were securing an area that had been established. They built a small unit checkpoint to control movements near the area. And this was near a populated area.

And as we've seen in other cases, a sport utility vehicle approached the checkpoint at a high rate of speed. After several unsuccessful non-lethal attempts to cause the vehicle to halt, it continued approaching the checkpoint, and this, again, as I mentioned, was near a populated area. There was a young sergeant in charge at that particular checkpoint, and he saw some objects in the back of this vehicle, ordered one of his gunners to open fire on the threatening vehicle.

This is an image of the vehicle from the rear after the attack. You can see that it's in an urban area with a kid standing on the side of the road. The weapon impacting the vehicle caused the vehicle to have a significant secondary explosion and a fireball. Let's go to the next image. The vehicle had been loaded with gas cylinders to be detonated in close proximity to the checkpoint. And finally, from the side.

Our soldiers and marines out there, and especially our junior leaders, are having to make very, very difficult but instantaneous life and death decisions, and they're the only one who can make those decisions. They're doing it very well, and they're also doing the best they can to protect the force as well as the Iraqi population.

The two corps attack by 5th Corps and 1st MEF continues to isolate Baghdad, denying any reinforcements or any escape by regime military forces. Fifth Corps controls the corridor from Karbala to Baghdad in the east. The 1st Marine Expeditionary Force controls the corridor from Samanpak (sp) to Baghdad. And I mentioned east first -- excuse me -- 5th Corps is in the west, 1st MEF is in the east. And we continue operations in and around that area, and beyond.

There was a raid last night by the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force. What they raided was a training camp near Samanpak (sp). And you can see the explosion along on the map near Samanpak (sp). This raid occurred in response to information that had been gained by coalition forces from some foreign fighters we encountered from other countries, not Iraq. And we believe that this camp had been used to train these foreign fighters in terror tactics. It is now destroyed.

We continue broadcasting non-stop radio over all of Iraq. We do know that radio is the most common and popular medium that is used by the Iraqi population and is consumed by them. A much smaller portion of the population has TV, and an even smaller portion, mostly elites, have access to cable and satellite television. Some of the examples of things we are saying on our broadcasts now to the Iraqi people, especially in the radio broadcasts -- first, we're telling the Iraqi people for their own safety to stay away from Baghdad International Airport. And this is certainly in direct contrast of what the regime is telling its citizens.

We're also explaining the importance of carefully following checkpoint instructions as they approach them. There are checkpoints that they may encounter. If they follow the instructions of the people at the checkpoint, there are not problems.

We explain to the Iraqis the types of atrocities and criminal acts that the regime is responsible for. And we're also telling the Iraqi forces that remain, specifically the Special Republican Guard and special security forces, that they should surrender, flee, or fight and face certain destruction.

The good news is life is proceeding into a new state of normal in other places, in places where the coalition has driven away the regime. Actions that we easily take for granted, things that have been stopped by the regime and the hazards of combat are now resuming. So, as we stop our combat actions, as we move the regime away, life can continue.

This is an example. A school in An-Najaf -- we've talked about that location over the last several days -- children are now safely returning to school, and they've begun school for the first time since before hostilities began. And the image is in stark contrast with the one I showed you a few days ago where, with the help of the local population, we were removing ammunition from the same school that had been used by regime death squads as a place to fight.

Our civil affairs units that are traveling behind our combat formations are skilled, they are professional, and they're making daily assessments of the needs of the population they encounter, and then they get to work trying to fulfill those needs, with the assistance of the population. That's part of the plan. It always has been part of the plan. And their efforts are making a major difference in the lives of newly liberated Iraqis. In some locations, our soldiers are facilitating the delivery of supplies, and that includes things that are already on hand in storage warehouses but weren't delivered by the regime, as this particular image shows. These are school supplies that were in an area near Basra. Our special operations forces moving through the area found this warehouse, discovered what it was, and began pushing them back out to the population. They had already been on hand, and for whatever reason the regime did not see fit to distribute them to the population of Basra.

Assisting with much of our humanitarian and civic work are free Iraqi forces team members. They continue to help us communicate and earn a high degree of trust. The teams also coordinate delivery of humanitarian assistance rations and the massive volumes of wheat and grain that are starting to flow in from all over the world, and we have much more of that coming here over the next several weeks, with many different countries making contributions. And those will come in by way of the ports that have been secured by our operations, and over land through areas that have been secured.

And with that, ladies and gentlemen, I'll take your questions. Please, sir.

Q. Will Adams, ABC. Two questions, General. First of all, you showed us the photograph of the vehicle with the cylinders in it. Anyone who has lived in this part of the world for any length of time knows that those are the kind of cylinders that everyone uses for domestic purposes, and often are transported in vehicles precisely

like that. Was there anything that you saw in that vehicle that proved that these were intended to be detonated?

And secondly, you mentioned the training camp near Samanpac (sp) and you said information from foreign fighters had helped you to identify that. Are you saying that there are foreign terrorist training camps in Iraq?

GEN. BROOKS: Well, first, with regard to the vehicle and what's inside of it, we know that those types of canisters can also be used as explosive devices, particularly when numbers of them are joined together. What we believe is the necessary decision-making down at the lower level is what is -- what is it that you see approaching? What behaviors are being exhibited? And how does that then match into things that have happened as patterns over time? Then a life and death decision is made.

When there is a need to do further investigation we will if we think something has been done incorrectly by rules of engagement that are out there, but in many cases we think that this is what's going to happen. And so while it's certainly possible that those things are commercial use activities, or commercial use items -- just like the vehicle is a civilian vehicle, and the people inside of it were in civilian clothes -- that still the modus that is used by regime death squads to perpetrate these types of terror attacks. Now, with regard to Samanpak (sp), that's just one of a number of examples we've found where there is training activity happening inside of Iraq. It reinforces the likelihood of links between his regime and external terrorist organizations, clear links with common interests. Some of these fighters came from Sudan, some from Egypt, and some from other places, and we've killed a number of them and we've captured a number of them, and that's where some of this information came from. We continue to be on the look out for those types of fighters. It certainly won't stop us operationally. We'll encounter them when we encounter them. But it does say an awful lot about the regime is taking to what's going on on the battlefield right now.

Yes, please.

Q. Thank you, General. Kelly O'Donnell from NBC. Can you confirm the attack on the man known as "Chemical Ali"? Is he the highest ranking regime leader who has been hit? And what do you think his death would mean for the potential of chemical weapons use?

GEN. BROOKS: Well, Kelly, first, we've made it clear that we're going to do a number of things to affect the decision making of this regime -- whether that is attacking decision-makers, like Chemical Ali is, and there are a number of others, obviously, in this regime as well, or if it's attacking the means by which they issue their instructions to do things that we think would be not in their interest to do, or whether it is attacking the means of delivery, like launchers for surface-to-surface missiles that might be able to carry chemical weapons or aircraft that might deliver those. All of that comes together to minimize the influence of this regime, minimize the ability of the regime to control itself. And we continue to remain satisfied that we are having a significant impact on this regime, that it no longer is in control.

As to whether or not he's the highest -- we've attacked higher than him, and we will continue to attack others in the regime. We've said that it's not about individuals, it's about the regime. And any piece of the regime that's out there, or any piece of this force that supports the regime, will be attacked, it will be destroyed, or it will be otherwise removed by their voluntary action.

Q. Do you believe he is the highest ranking that has been killed?

GEN. BROOKS: I'm not going to characterize what the status is at this point. I don't think we know for sure. I know that we certainly knew that he was our target, and we know that we feel comfortable that his bodyguard is now dead. As to Chemical Ali himself, I think time will tell.

Yes, sir.

Q. David Lee Miller, Fox News. There's a report of a friendly fire incident in the north. If you know anything about that and can elaborate, I would appreciate it. And secondly, have any weapons of mass destruction been found? And is there anything to suggest now that maybe this regime tried to move some of those weapons into Syria or other locations which we have heard for the past few weeks?

GEN. BROOKS: We do have some initial reports of an engagement that occurred in the north that involved some coalition forces and some Peshmerga with whom we have been conducting operations in the north. We don't know the specifics of the circumstance at this point. As with every other report like this, we'll dig into it, find out what the contributing circumstances are, and try to come to some degree of closure on not only what happened but also if there are some things we need to learn from it, how it happened and what we can do to prevent it from happening again, if indeed we have some involvement in that. So, that's something that's still underway. It's ongoing, and it's a very fresh report as well, so it's going to take a little while before we get to the bottom of it.

Weapons of mass destruction are something that are -- that remain a focus of this operation. It is not the primary focus. We are still conducting combat operations focused on the regime. That's the first order of business. However, there are some places that we have now access to areas that we do searches for weapons of mass destruction, either based on our anticipated or our knowledge beforehand that there may have been weapons of mass destruction stored there, developed there, over time.

So, in some cases, it may be years ago that we had that information. As we get access to the locations, we'll search, often with the assistance of people who were working there. And as we get closer to Baghdad, we have more places that are like that.

I think we can certainly be sure that this regime has been skillful at hiding the things they have. There are a number of items we've already encountered on the battlefield that they said they didn't have, and yet we found them -- whether it's minds that float up, or missiles that go beyond 150 kilometers. Any number of other things are out there.

And so while we can't say where they may have been moved to, we certainly anticipate that there have been deliberate efforts to bury, hide, move, disperse -- all these efforts that were part of the denial and deception campaign. And as time goes on, and we get more access to the people who know what really was happening inside the regime, that aren't supportive of the regime, after the regime is gone, we believe that we'll be able to do the deliberate work necessary to find -- to find more of it.

Tom, please.

Q. Tom Mintier with CNN. There is a report being carried by ITAR-TASS that some vehicles carrying Russian diplomats out of Baghdad were struck by coalition aircraft. Number one, did it happen? Number two, were you notified in advance of the departure of this delegation of Russians from Baghdad?

GEN. BROOKS: We have some initial reports from our embassy in Russia that there may have been some sort of action that occurred with respect to that set of vehicles leaving Iraq. We were aware of them leaving Iraq. We certainly had information about that, and had an anticipation of how they might move. And with that we wanted to ensure we were providing as much protection as we could.

We don't know the circumstances surrounding this, or even the factual basis of it yet. We understand that they

are still moving at this point in time. And as we get more information, we certainly will -- absolutely want to get to the bottom of that particular --

Q. (Off mike)?

GEN. BROOKS: I don't know whether it has or not. There are reports that it has been, but we don't have any specifics that confirm that in any way at this point in time.

Q. You just said it was still moving.

GEN. BROOKS: We understand that this group of vehicles is still moving, yes. And what we don't know is any coalition involvement, whether in fact someone was hit, what the circumstances were around a reported hit. And we'll see what we can find out about the rest of the story -- very, very fresh report just minutes before we came in here.

Yes, please, sir?

Q. General, Jeff Meade (ph) from Sky News. Yesterday's was Baghdad's -- (inaudible) -- Basra. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about the British action into the second city this morning, how you characterized it, what it's achieving and what it's possible outcome is.

Can I also put you also -- small issue -- you talked about deception there. At your last appearance you showed us a building, a command and control center in Tikrit that you said had been bombed on the 2nd of April. I wonder how you can explain that the same building damaged -- it's quite a distinctive building -- was shown on Iraqi TV nine days before. Is this really a podium of truth, or are both sides practicing deception? GEN. BROOKS: Well, first, let me talk about the U.K. forces. As I mentioned yesterday, we are very, very proud of them, and we are proud to be partners with them in this coalition. They are doing exceptional work down in the south. We've already advanced very rapidly in the bringing on of the humanitarian aspects of this operation as quickly as it could be possibly done. And at the same time we find the U.K. forces are doing tremendous and deliberate work in Basra and areas beyond it, and they've had an exceptional effect on the regime forces that are in there. Their work is not complete, and I would certainly leave full characterization of exactly what unit is doing what to the U.K. forces to lay out for themselves. But they are doing very, very well, and we remain proud partners with them in this coalition.

The strikes that I showed you are derived from intelligence products. They're real photographs, and the information we pass you is that which we can pass you from our knowledge of exactly what has happened. So I know that what I am delivering you is what I know as fact from those operations, and that's probably as far as I can take it.

Yes, sir, in the back, please?

Q. Jonathan Marks (ph), BBC. Prior to your move on Baghdad you were able to characterize for us which particular Iraqi divisions of the Republican Guard were broadly speaking in that area. Could you try to set out for us now what organized formations the Iraqis still have in the area of the capital? Could you also give us some sense of the state of command and control? And you continually show us these buildings being struck, which are command and control centers. I find it extraordinary to imagine that any Iraqis turn up for work in these buildings each and every day. If I worked in one of these buildings, I'd be a very, very long way away from it. So, I mean, are you hitting empty buildings? What actually is the state of command and control?

GEN. BROOKS: Okay. The forces that were in and around Baghdad were mostly Republican Guard forces

command -- but not exclusively. We saw some mixtures, or some indications that there may have been some regular army forces that may have gotten in and amongst them to either reinforce them or that were held from escaping themselves. We saw some paramilitaries. We have seen some technical vehicles, as we refer to them, civilian vehicles that have been outfitted with weapons. And so there's a mixture that's up inside of there. That makes it a little bit difficult to characterize exactly what we face.

What we do know is for the forces we encountered and focused our efforts against, we have inflicted a considerable degree of destruction, and many of those units cease to exist as effective combat formations. In some cases we found abandoned equipment in the tins and tins of abandoned tanks and personnel carriers. In some cases we found equipment we had effectively destroyed by some of our air power being directed against the Iraqi formations that were out there -- as we were arriving and before we arrived. In other cases we saw some of the devastating effects of direct-fire systems and indirect-fire systems supporting ground maneuvers -- attack helicopters we use in support of ground maneuver. So the path that was cut was cut through units in most cases.

Having said that, we know that there are still some formations that are out there. There are still parts of the Republican Guard command, the Al Nida Division in particular, part of the Hammurabi Division, the Adnan (ph) Division still in the north. We'll still fight them, unless they choose to surrender. Some of them may have moved toward Baghdad, but we have not seen any big movements into Baghdad -- certainly not since the call for everyone to come rushing to Baghdad, or the call for everyone to rush from Baghdad out to Baghdad Airport. We have not seen any examples of organized combat action. There are small packets that usually conduct counter attacks. They are generally company sized -- somewhere between 20 and 40 vehicles with associated paramilitaries, sometimes some technical, sometimes some infantry in or not in uniform. And those are dealt with when they arrive. We believe that there are still some low levels of command and control in some of the military formations. But as we find capability that exhibits that we attack it. So, for example, we attacked two division command posts while we were attacking their formations. We were able to identify them, locate them, and we struck them -- and the strikes were effective. That takes away a level of command and control.

You asked about the buildings inside of Baghdad that we showed. Most of those regime-related buildings are places that house command and control structures, that house the junction between a fiber optic network and some other things -- different means of communication. So we'll strike that to break the links for communication in most of those cases.

In some cases they may be empty. In fact, we do try to attack at certain times when people aren't at work. We're trying to destroy the capability, not the population. All that goes into the mixture of how we conduct our operations. There's probably a lot more information than you can take in, but since you ask that long question -- whoever is going to go to work though, when they start going back to work, very much as they are in the south, it will be with our help.

Next question, please. Yes, ma'am.

Q. Hi, Nicole Enfield (ph), Associated Press. This morning we heard that the toll from the Baghdad raid yesterday, somewhere in the area of 2,000 to 3,000 Iraqi fighters killed. I'm just wondering how you came up with that number. It's a lot of people, and early Saturday morning in Baghdad. We haven't heard much of enemy tolls to date. So I'm just wondering why we're hearing that number now, and where it came from.

And, second, on the Republican Guard -- you've been saying that it's melting away, a lot of people just deciding not to fight. Is there not a concern on the part of the coalition that even after you establish some kind of a presence that they might come back as a guerrilla force -- that they might just be melting away now only

to return if not tomorrow, some other time in the future?

GEN. BROOKS: Well, first, you haven't seen me use numbers very much, because they're very difficult to lay out and then stand on, first because reports change over time as you get more information; and also because in many cases they have to be based upon estimates. We're talking about the results of combat action in this case that in many cases results in the physical destruction of human beings. You can't always make an accurate count. We certainly aren't stopping to count. And so the practice of laying out numbers is something I personally try to stay away from for that reason.

In this case there are estimates out there based on the amount of force that was encountered, the types of systems that were involved in the action, things that where we know that we were involved in direct fire fights that many of you were able to witness with the embedded media that went along with part of that attack, and the number of systems that we had involved and the type of engagements that occurred. So that's an estimation. It could be on the order of 2,000. It could be more than 2,000. It could be somewhat less than 2,000. We know that it was a considerable amount of destruction on all of the force that was encountered. And so I've tried to characterize it in those types of terms, a considerable amount of destruction in virtually every engagement that we have. It's very one-sided. In some cases we take a few wounded. In some cases we have one or two killed. But in all cases we inflict a considerable amount of destruction on whatever force that comes into contact with us. It just is not worth trying to characterize by numbers. And, frankly, if we are going to be honorable about our warfare, we are not out there trying to count up bodies. This is not the appropriate way for us to go.

Q. (Off mike)?

GEN. BROOKS: Your second question -- I don't recall what that was. Prompt me again, please.

Q. The Republican Guard that's melting away now --

GEN. BROOKS: Yes, okay, are they going to come back as guerrillas? They would do so at their peril. We believe when the regime is gone there will still be some who are true believers. There may be still evidence of terroristic behavior. We don't think all that's going to just disappear. But we also know that many of them have chosen not to fight and to seek a future Iraq, and we think that the actions we'll take will reinforce that decision for those who have made that choice. There's no way to account for how many made the decision to just walk off the battlefield and never fight again. There's no way to account for how many are hiding from the regime so as to not be killed by them for having made that choice. We can't make that kind of accounting.

What we can do is recognize, as we have throughout this operation, that there are certain capabilities that will always exist out there that can threaten the force and also threaten the peace, and we'll deal with those in a logical and appropriate way.

Let me come back to the right. Yes, ma'am?

Q. I'm Louise Skillane (ph), CBS News. We're told that one U.S. soldier was killed yesterday, and the Iraqis are reporting 50 soldiers killed, two Apache helicopters shot down. Can you specify U.S. losses yesterday in Baghdad?

GEN. BROOKS: Well, just as I will not characterize in numbers the losses that we inflict, I am not going to characterize in numbers the losses we sustained. There's a mechanism by which that's reported through official channels after we have notified family members who are involved and other things. I will say that we did in fact have a report of a killed in action yesterday. That is true. Numbers are not appropriate. I'll tell you

the numbers were very, very small. But any one number, any loss of any one of our service members out there is something that gives us pain and concern, but it doesn't stop this operation, and they would not want us to stop the operation. So that's really where we stand on that.

Yes, sir, please?

Q. John Chalmers (ph) with Reuters. Can you confirm reports Special Forces severed the oil pipeline between Syria, and indeed the rail link between Syria and Iraq? And, secondly, could you run us through some of the problems you are likely to face as the temperatures rise and how you surmount them on the battlefield?

GEN. BROOKS: I don't want to characterize specifically what work is being done. We know that we want to preserve the oil infrastructure of Iraq, and we have been focused on doing that throughout the conduct of our operations, and we are not going to do things within our power to put that future, that resource, at risk. I should just leave it at that.

The heat conditions that are out there -- the heat is certainly rising, but there are forces that are out there on the battlefield, coalition forces that have trained in the heat. They trained in a variety of environments. They trained with their systems. They trained with their chemical protective overgarments on, and they are accustomed to dealing with this degree of hardship.

Now, having said that, it's hot. And when it's hot, decisions get made by all commanders, probably even Iraqi commanders in this case. The weather effects on the battlefield affect everyone on the battlefield. The advantage goes to the force that is trained to deal with those weather conditions when they occur -- whether it's daytime, nighttime, rainstorm -- whatever it happens to be -- or even heat. And so we feel confident that our forces are well prepared, they are well trained, they get better with every day's action that goes by, and the regime gets in greater and greater danger with every moment they have chosen to remain in place.

Please?

Q. (Off mike) -- ABC News. In the investigations that you are conducting regarding the several checkpoint attacks conducted by and carried out by Iraqis against coalition forces. Have you -- can you confirm that any remote-controlled devices, explosive devices, were used in these attacks against coalition forces?

And a second question is we haven't heard too much about the two sons about Saddam Hussein, Qusay and Uday. Do you have any indications that they are dead or alive? Thank you, sir.

GEN. BROOKS: I don't have any information on whether or not we found any remote-control devices. We've heard some anecdotal reports, but not anything official that I have seen at this point in time. We certainly know that that is a tactic that's used in a variety of places in the world where someone might be pressed into labor as a human bomb of some sort, whether they're driving it or walking it, and they don't have control of the detonation. So that certainly is a tactic that we would not be surprised at, but I don't have any specific reports related to it.

As to the sons, they are members of the regime. If we have indications that they are alive and moving, we attack them. If we don't see them on the battlefield, we don't pursue them. It's not about individuals; it's about the regime and any capability we see out there we will go after. So I don't want to get specific about what their conditions are. I think that they have probably not been seen on Iraqi TV lately -- certainly not in any live broadcasts. And, if they were, we might be visiting them during that time. So I'll just leave that alone.

Yes, ma'am?

Q. (Off mike) -- with USA Today. Have you -- can you describe any forays that U.S. forces have made into Baghdad today, this morning? And can you tell me what the strategic idea is behind those kind of parades through town?

GEN. BROOKS: Well, given the degree of destruction that occurred yesterday and the significant loss of life on the part of the Iraqi forces that challenges that operation, I certainly wouldn't characterize it the way you have. It was a combat action. It certainly demonstrated our ability to operate within Baghdad at a time and place of our choosing, and to inflict severe damage on anyone that opposes the force that comes into Baghdad.

It should also make a very clear statement about how much control the regime does or does not have. Even while the attack was ongoing there were reports that we hadn't even reached the airport. And so there's a degree of reality in there that I think is settling into a number of people inside of Baghdad, and soon we believe it will settle in also on members of the regime. The nature of our approach to Baghdad, I should emphasize, will be like our approach to other places. We will do our operations on our plan, conducting attacks at a time and a place of our choosing, when the battle conditions are set by us in a way that's favorable for the outcomes we seek. And so that will be deliberate work. Sometimes it will be just like that (snaps fingers) -- and we're into Baghdad. Sometimes we'll stay, sometimes we won't. Sometimes it will be like what you see in Basra or Najaf or Nasiriyah where we want to attack a specific regime location where a meeting is ongoing and kill everyone that's in the meeting. We might do that in some cases. That could happen in Baghdad.

What I would emphasize is our approach still remains focused. It also remains oriented on protecting the population as much as possible, and keeping them away from the combat, if we can. You've seen the things -- the decisions being taken by the regime that put the population at risk, and so again there's caution that I would emphasize that the population does get put at risk when we work in an urban area. We will be as careful as we can in the operations, but we'll also be very effective against the regime.

Yes, sir, please?

Q. It's Paul Hunter from Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Do you accept yet as a possibility that you might not find chemical weapons because they've gone to Syria or they've been destroyed by your own aerial bombardment? And if that's the case, would it matter if you have regime change -- would it matter if you didn't also have the chemical weapons smoking gun?

GEN. BROOKS: We know that we want Iraq to be free of weapons of mass destruction when this operation is complete. At whatever point we say the operation is over, that is one of the stated objectives. We will search for it. We will assist in searching for it, and we will expect assistance in searching for it. While we haven't found anything yet, we think that the places where it's most likely to be found, we haven't even gotten to most of them yet, and there's a considerable number out there where there could be weapons of mass destruction or evidence of weapons of mass destruction programs. And so we are not ruling anything out at this point, whether they will be there or not, whether they have been moved or not. What we are focused on right now is the removal of the regime. That comes first. Searching for weapons of mass destruction in a concentrated way comes after that. And we believe that we will -- we still believe that the regime has them; and we also believe they have the will to use them. We take away more and more mechanisms by which they can use them at this point, but we are not finished yet.

Yes, sir, please?

Q. Good afternoon, general. Neil Tweedie from the Daily Telegraph in London. Just on that point, were you not surprised when you overran Republican Guard positions that there were no chemical shells in those positions?

GEN. BROOKS: "Surprise" is not really the right term to use. I think the better way to describe it is that we had new information, that we did not find chemical weapon shells in the positions that we passed through at this point. Does that mean they are not with the other divisions on the north side of Baghdad? It doesn't mean that yet. Does it mean that they are not potentially going to be used by something that's been repositioned elsewhere, different delivery systems? It doesn't mean that yet. Does it mean that they are not potentially available for aircraft to deliver and not to be used by artillery? That can't be ruled out yet. So while we've passed through and taken away the potential for use by those units, there's still potential for use by other units and other mechanisms, and we remain as seriously focused on it as we were from the start. I would say that the closer we get, even across what we characterized as the red line before, there are fewer and fewer options on what can be used to deliver weapons of mass destruction. Certainly early in the war we had Ababil 100s that could have delivered into Kuwait. That area is no longer safe for them to do any launches, and we haven't had any launches in that area. It's been taken away. As we continue to advance, more areas are taken away. At the same time, we don't take for granted the fact that there could be something that was hidden that's now uncovered somewhere behind us. And so while we do our security work, that includes looking for things that are threats, whether it's technical vehicles with machine guns on them, or car bombs, or regime members that are holed up in a certain place in a town, or things that could deliver weapons of mass destruction. That's where we will remain focused, taking nothing for granted; pleased that it wasn't used to date, but not satisfied that the hazard is gone.

Yes, sir, please?

Q. George Kurad (ph), chief of the National Newspapers Publishers Association News Service, the Black Press of the United States. As you move closer to Baghdad, have you gotten any more information on coalition soldiers who have been captured? And is there any reassurance that you can give those families waiting for news?

GEN. BROOKS: George, I wish I did have some good news to tell on that, but the reality is we have not heard anything by way of the ICRC. I don't believe the ICRC has been given access, the International Committee of the Red Cross has been given access to our prisoners yet. We still hold the regime accountable, completely responsible for anything that is done to prisoners of war that have been taken of the battlefield. We expect them to be treated the same way we treat theirs -- and we now have over 6,000 -- that number continues to grow -- and we take care of them as well as we can. In some cases we provided surgery. We also provide food, water and shelter. We have been inspected by the ICRC and remain open to that. That expectation applies also to what we have for the regime, but we don't have any news at this point. And we remain hopeful that they are being cared for properly. At the same time, we remain active in trying to seek their release or their rescue.

Yes, sir, please -- then I'll come to the front row. Q. (Off mike) --- Australia. Can you just give us some more information about this attack in Salman Pak? You mentioned there were several other foreign fighters. Can you give us some more details about those nationalities, and what was in the camp to characterize it as a terrorist training facility?

GEN. BROOKS: The -- there are a number of nations that were involved. I don't know all of them. I know that we had some from Egypt, some from Sudan, in people that we captured. And that was before the raid -- that gave us information about the raid. The nature of the work being done by some of those people that we captured, their inferences to the type of training they received -- all these things give us the impression that

there is terrorist training that was conducted at Salman Pak. We did also find some other things there. We found some tanks -- and destroyed them. We found some armored personnel carriers, and destroyed them in small numbers. We destroyed some buildings that were used for command and control, and some other buildings that were used for morale and welfare. We destroyed the complex. All of that, when you roll it together, their reports where they're from, why they might be here, tell us that there is still a linkage clearly between this regime and terrorism, and it's something we want to make sure we break.

Q. (Off mike)?

GEN. BROOKS: There's no indications of specific organizations that I am aware of inside of that. We may still find it. As with all operations we conduct into a place, we look for more information after the operation is complete. We'll pull documents out of it, and see what those documents say, if there's any links or indications. We'll look and see if there are any persons that are recovered that may not be Iraqi. All that is detailed and deliberate work that happens after the fact.

Let me come to the front row, please.

Q. (Off mike) -- from al Jazeera. Reports coming from Washington said that Apache helicopters face a lot of problems, meaning technical problems, on the ground, and that CENTCOM will minimize the use of Apaches. What's your comment, please?

GEN. BROOKS: Well, the Apache helicopter is a great combat system. It is crash worthy, when it does go down. We had some hard landings, and crews walked away. It is battle worthy -- we have had some Apaches take fire, and they've flown back to base-- in some cases with holes in the side. It's functioning exactly as it was designed. It's having an effect, a significant effect on the enemy, and we are increasing the number of Apaches. I would just highlight that with the units that we have already on the battlefield, inside units like the 3rd Infantry Division, there are attack helicopters, Apaches. In units that are arriving, there are attack helicopters, Apaches. In the 101st, which we currently have in use, there are attack helicopters, Apaches. In Fifth Corps there's an attack helicopter regiment. The number is increasing. Their involvement on the battlefield is increasing, and the destruction that comes as a result will also increase.

I think we have time for one more question. Yes, sir, on the left side.

Q. General Brooks, could you just clarify the situation -- sorry -- (inaudible) -- from the Independent in London. Could you just clarify the situation at the airport? As you know, the Iraqis claiming that the situation is more fluid than we understand it is. Is it 100 percent secure, 90 percent secure? How would you characterize it?

GEN. BROOKS: Well, being a conservative military guy, I would never say 100 percent secure on anything. But I will tell you that the airport is clearly under coalition control. We have increased the amount of presence in that location. We continue to expand the area beyond the airport to eliminate the influence of coalition -- I'm sorry, of regime forces. There are still battles that happen -- to the northwest, for example, there have been some pretty good fights that occurred. We are still moving beyond it, and we are able to operate the way we intend to operate inside of the airfield. There's still work to be done in there. There are a lot of building complexes. It's an international airport. And it also doubled as a regime command and control facility. So until everything is cleared, until every potential booby trap is gone, until every obstruction is off of runways, we don't say it's completely secured. But that work is ongoing, even while we conduct combat operations to destroy any additional regime forces we encounter.

Thanks very much, ladies and gentlemen. Have a good day.

(end transcript)

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