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**Presenter:** Senior Defense Official

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DoD Background Briefing on Strategic Support Teams

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Let me sort of start just with a basic -- (inaudible) -- and (name of briefer) here can take you through some -- the -- in the aftermath of the Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom campaigns, (name of briefer) and his people, senior military officials, sat down and did a whole list of lessons learned. They covered the waterfront.

And I don't know -- half a dozen of them or more came back to the question of the human intelligence capabilities of the department and whether they were properly structured, organized, trained. And we had a basis for supporting the needs of operational commanders. That is to say the combatant commanders or their JTF commanders, so the two-star, three-star level of activities.

The closer we looked at it, the closer (name of briefer) looked at it, the more convinced he became that we did not have the right organization, the right structure, the right training, and more importantly, that we hadn't organized them in a way -- that is, the human capabilities in the department -- to serve on what, for lack of a better term, we might call rotational basis in two places like Iraq and Afghanistan.

And so during the course of those campaigns, any number of times he would talk, and he would say: Where am I going to find the next handful of people to send over to CENTCOM or Afghanistan or Iraq? Because I'm having to take people from other places, other parts of the world, other activities in which they are engaged, in order to be able to meet the demand.

So he put together a proposal, which has come to be characterized as the Strategic Support Branch. That proposal was put forward as part of a broader proposal cosponsored by the secretary of Defense and DCI to increase the amount of funding that went to human intelligence capabilities both at the agency -- CIA, and at DIA. And that was initially put forward in the FY '05 budget, went forward as part of all of the standard materials that this department puts forward for that purpose, briefed staffs in the appropriations and intelligence oversight committees. At one point, the senior military official present here briefed it -- or included it as part of his statement to the oversight committees; that is, we were going to move forward to put together these teams for the purposes that (briefer name deleted) will describe.

Now there was -- and I'll stop here -- sort of one little unfortunate arrangement here, which was that when it was briefed forward, they were called one thing -- I think it was Human Augmentation Teams?

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Yes, sir.

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: And in response to the questions of staff, which suggested that that title was a much too ordinary title and made you think of them operating at a very low level when indeed this was meant to operate at the three-star level of concern, maybe it ought to have a different name. And so it was given the name of Strategic Support Teams -- that is what the teams were called -- made up of interrogators and collectors and so forth.

And they were to be managed by the Strategic Support Branch, which is an office inside of DIA -- and I'll turn it over to (briefer name deleted) at this point -- whose purpose is to manage those individuals and the teams and their training and preparation, it is not -- it is not -- an operational command unit.

The operational command for these people when they're deployed belongs to the commander in the field, and he has operational control of the unit team when it is deployed. Its deployment takes place on his request. So he requests the support; it goes in to the DIA, DIA processes it through the Strategic Support Branch, sends a team over; and once it arrives in theater, it belongs to the commander who asked for it. It isn't commanded by the Strategic Support Branch. Okay?

Q Not below the three-star level, you're saying?

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Well, he in turn can put it wherever he thinks it belongs, because it's his asset to be employed for his purposes.

Q And prior to this there was no capability like that for that --

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Done that way.

And so let me turn it over to (briefer name deleted).

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: What we found in Afghanistan and in Iraq, as previously was said, was that we were fighting a long-term war with basically a pick-up team drawn from our Defense HUMINT service capabilities more broadly. Pick-up team sounds wrong maybe in the sense, I mean, these are people that had training in skill areas, but we're pulling them from other locations. When you do that, first, you don't have a long-term sustainment kind of capability, and secondly, you deplete the capabilities from the place where they were drawn from.

So the concept here was -- with what was originally called HAT teams, HUMINT Augmentation Teams -- was to have a set of teams that were trained and prepared and assigned to positions that were designed very clearly to go forward and support operational commanders. And by doing this you could rotate out of this group of people and relieve this, you know, this broader burden of pulling folks from other jobs and locations.

And I'll give you an example. We've had -- you know, defense unit people forward with commanders all the way back to early Afghanistan. One of our people was very instrumental in the -- developing the information that eventually led to the detention of Saddam. That person was not an Arabic linguist -- in fact, was a linguist in a completely different language area -- and was pulled out and sent forward for a six-month, I think, that turned into, you know, a seven- or eight-month assignment. We have determined that's not the way to do business.

So the HAT team program which is now -- with a name change, as was discussed -- the Strategic Support Team concept is to improve our capabilities, to put more specific kinds of skills and send people forward as a team, meaning that they are used not only to working with each other but they exercise -- are used to working with the commanders that they are likely to go forward and augment. They go forward, they work for the commander. They are part of our ability to provide -- it's a term that's gotten to be -- actionable intelligence; in other words, provide intelligence directly that can be acted upon by the military forces under that commander's purview.

The funding was begun in fiscal year '05, which means that the funds became available in October of last year. We are in the start-up phase of organizing these teams -- I mean, three months or four months have past at this point. And so we are continuing our operations as we have in the past as we bring these teams online.

Again, the office or the branch that was talked about, "branch" isn't the same as sort of a branch of service. In our organization you have divisions and offices and branch, and so it's a relatively small number of people. They are in place to provide the organization and the structure as they start up this new capability.

Q Are you suggesting that the change of the name possibly has confused some members of Congress who are saying that they don't remember ever being briefed on this?

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: I don't know. It is a fact, though, that when we went back and looked in the budget justification books, it was in the budget justification book as a HUMINT augmentation team, okay? So if anyone went back and looked and said gee, where is it, and said what's the strategic support branch, the two would not **jive** is all I'm saying.

Q So they have been briefed all along from the very beginning on this?

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: It was part of our, you know, budget proposal and was, you know, was briefed at various points along the way.

I might add that it is -- it was orchestrated and coordinated with the DCI and his staff right from inception. And I've had the opportunity to talk to the DCI today, and there are no issues or questions or concerns of any of the processes that went into establishing the teams and the process we went through.

I'd also point out that not only -- I mean, the only thing that has changed literally is the name. The sizing, the dollars, the mission, the objective, all of those things have remained consistent throughout, and they were -- as coordinated with the DCI and his staff on the front end and as presented and, you know, authorized and appropriated; you know, coming out of the budget processes.

Q How many people are on it?

Q A couple questions.

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: And let me just -- at the -- the money is in the National Foreign Intelligence Program, which is the program that is under the DCI, and all of the authorities required for this team to operate are existing authorities in place under the DCI's auspices.

Q All the money for this is under the DCI, not the --

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: It is. It is all -- it is National Foreign Intelligence Program appropriated to us for this purpose --

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: In the account --

Q Can you tell us how many?

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: In the General Defense Intelligence Program.

Q How much? Can you tell us how much?

Q Sir, any --

Q Could you give us a ballpark?

Q Could you at least give us a percentage increase of what you're putting into HUMINT?

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: I don't have it at my fingertips, but it's part of the -- it's part of the top-line increase that began in Fiscal Year '05 for specifically targeted for improving the nation's HUMINT capabilities, which include the CIA's and the capabilities we bring to the table.

Q Are these teams -- are these civilian and military folks? Are they only Defense Department folks, or are they Defense and CIA? And are these people in any way operators or are they analysts? You see what I mean?

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Yes, I'm with you.

Q All right.

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Primarily civilian. We're looking for continuity and long-term capabilities here in terms of linguistic skills and so forth. They would be all DIA, but they would have the capability to merge with and work with the CIA capabilities in the field, if necessary. And the teams are HUMINT teams, so their focus is on people that have skills as case officers, interrogators, debriefers, and people that would provide support to those skill areas.

Would we ever put analysts with those teams? Absolutely. If that was the right composition and the commander had need for more analytical skills forward, absolutely. In effect, we're doing that kind of merging of analysis and collection when it's what the commander requests.

Q How many people on a team, and how many teams are there?

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: We're looking to have them small. But again, they're going to be tailored to the requirements. But the novel number we're working with is about 10 people, and then we can combine them, or whatever.

Q And how many teams?

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: I'd rather not get into what sort of the total number, commitment, over a number of years is, but it's small tailorable teams.

Q And this would be teams that would be used in -- you know, assigned to a certain mission? Or are you talking 10 people per HAT team?

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: No. It's -- again, we're going to size for requirements. So -- and it might be 10 people, it might be, you know, five of the 10, and maybe you don't need all those skills at a certain time. So it's an expandable kind of a thing. And you might actually get in a situation where you needed more than one team, and so you could size and mix appropriately.

They are not designed specifically -- or solely for Iraq and Afghanistan, they're designed to support combatant commanders and joint task forces where those needs exist. But obviously, on the front end of the war on terrorism there will be skill sets very heavily focused on the needs we would see they're having in that area.

Q Have they been deployed anywhere besides Iraq and Afghanistan thus far?

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Well see, we really haven't deployed teams as -- you know, as described here as these Strategic Support Teams. Up until now, we have been deploying from the larger base of those capabilities and Defense HUMINT services, as I said earlier, sort of individual augmentations drawn broadly from our capabilities.

Q Before this, you mean --

Q (Off mike.)

Q Before this you've been drawing from --

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: From our defense capabilities, but not using this team concept nor using the term "strategic support teams" because obviously that's in fiscal year '05, you know, funding --

MR. DIRITA: But the '05 funding, which was just October -- (inaudible) -- last year. So we're only at -- not even -- about a third of the way into the year.

Q But this person you said was instrumental in helping find Saddam --

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Was a person who was drawn from our larger population of Defense HUMINT officers, but came from a completely, you know, different region, plucked out literally as the one person put in to -- you know, put in to that particular job, had skills but was not, you know -- had the full set of training, but was operating in a region, in a language and a situation completely different from his primary area of expertise.

Q Could you give us any more details about that? I mean, how this person --

Q (Inaudible) -- that concept now, at this point?

Q -- was able to analyze some information somebody else couldn't analyze? I mean --

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: It was -- no. What it was was interrogation skills with the Special Ops teams, developing information and acting on it over a period of time as they worked themselves closer to, you know, Saddam's final hiding place.

Q But just to be clear, you said that was an example of -- although it worked -- of not how you wanted to do business.

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: And that would be an example of the kinds of capabilities that will be embedded in these teams and will be -- it'll be a strengthened capability, more specifically designed for that task and for that go-forward kind of task that I'm, you know, alluding to here with Saddam's capture.

MR. DIRITA: I think the way I would -- (inaudible) -- is -- and you can correct me -- but if the teams had existed when we were searching for Saddam, we would have wanted that capability in the field.

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Out in the field as an organized, coherent, you know, planned kind of an evolution.

Q And another point of clarification, so have these teams at this point been deployed anywhere yet?

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: No.

Q In other words, it's still a --

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Not under this concept.

Q Not under this concept.

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: The capabilities are forward, but the teams are not.

Q And one more thing. Aside from the fact that obviously you believe this is a better way to manage things and there are more resources being devoted to it, is there anything about this concept that expands/broadens the scope of the Pentagon's intelligence- gathering operation? Is there any expansion into areas that they haven't -- haven't been before, or is this simply a better way of doing what you tried to do before?

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Better and increased capabilities. And I think, you know, and this is part -- you know, strengthening our, you know, defense and our defense HUMINT capabilities.

Q But no encroachment on the CIA's job?

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Done completely in coordination with and full -- you know, full knowledge and participation. And frankly, what we're trying to do is make sure that we have a capability to meet that commander's requirements.

Q One of the charges that --

Q So before you may have had HUMINT teams working with operators, but on an ad hoc basis? Is that --

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: That's -- yes, sir.

Q One of the charges in the Washington Post article that I think would raise hackles on the Hill is that these teams would be deployed without formal deployment orders being published prior to hostilities in an area. Could you talk about that?

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: That won't happen with these teams.

Q That won't happen.

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: No. They are designed to support a JTF commander in his operation. Those operations have to have been authorized and so forth prior to that commander then, in turn, turning to the DIA director to say, "This is the support I'm going to need. Please provide."

Q All right.

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: And so, I mean, there's a sequencing that has to follow.

Q So what's that guy -- (inaudible)?

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: You know, I've been looking for it.

Q Been quoted --

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: I know. And I think it has to do, I believe, with an entirely different subject.

Q Let's talk about that one, too --

(Cross talk.)

Q Would you tell us whether --

MR. DIRITA: Here we have -- just if I can -- before you get -- probably about another three or four minutes before they have to depart and go to the Hill. And I apologize. I wish we had more time, but why don't we get to some --

Q Okay.

Q Can you tell us what constitutes covert action and DOD -- (inaudible) -- as opposed to clandestine activities, and which would DOD be engaging in with respect to this? And will these teams use methods such as non-official cover and the use of false nationalities in their activities?

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: I'll take on the last one first. No, that is not part of the -- non-official cover is not part of this operating concept.

Q Thank you.

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: These teams would be involved in clandestine operations, where their identities would not be known, but not in covert operations.

Q How do you define the difference between the two? How does DOD see the

difference between the two?

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: The difference -- now I need to be corrected, if possible, here. But just as covert operations require a finding and in those kinds of operations the U.S. disavows any involvement, these would not require a finding, would be done under existing authorities for clandestine operations that exist, and come under, you know, the DCI's purview.

Q I have a question.

Q You said that these are not being deployed now. At what point will they be robust enough to be deployed --

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: I can't give you exactly a timeline. In this fiscal year.

Q So you don't have like an IOC type --

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: What we're doing is just -- it will -- we'll flesh them out and prepare them for deployment on -- you know, on -- you know, throughout the year. So, you know, as one becomes available, it's available to go and will just be --

Q It's at the request of the COCOMS or base commanders?

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Those requirements are out there in large numbers, and they began with Afghanistan and Iraq. Where we would use the teams, to accomplish the missions that we're doing today with individual -- (inaudible).

Q (Off mike) -- existing authorities, but there was, again, much written in that article about how DOD went back in after 9/11 and looked at much of that -- (inaudible) -- whatever, and came up with essentially new interpretations that are much more -- (inaudible).

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: I'll tell you what I know, and that is that before any proposals for any element of change within the Defense Intelligence establishment were to made, it was important to be certain we understood the differences between those things which were appropriately the authority of the DCI and those which were the authority of the secretary of Defense, where they were similar, where they merged, and so forth. So that was done. So the proposals, then, that would go forward to the secretary would be in accordance with those authorities.

The issue of new authorities, I believe, is not related, again, to this at all. To the extent that anybody has ever even raised the question, it is a result of the tasking out of the 9/11 commission, which is related to the paramilitary operations and then who has what authority to do different activities under some grant of authority from the president. So that's got nothing to do with this Strategic Support Branch or anything else.

Q But that's what we're trying to understand. This sounds a lot like spy stuff, versus military stuff.

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: What sounds like spy stuff?

Q The stuff you described.



SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: It's human intelligence.

Q I understand that, but I'm saying I think for a person reading these stories, it sounds more like spy stuff than military stuff. I'm trying to understand how you guys draw the distinction based on your interpretation of these laws.

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: It's not a question of interpretation of the law. Again, let's sort of review the bidding here. The teams that we're talking about here, the Strategic Support Teams, are funded within the general Defense Intelligence Program, which itself is inside the National Foreign Intelligence Program, which is under the aegis of the DCI. So the package that we're talking about here, that we submitted in the '05 bill, was drawn up in coordination with the DCI staff. So this has been a product that was jointly agreed between, broadly, the secretary and the DCI and then applied between the two organizations for the express purpose of improving the human intelligence capability both within CIA and within DIA. That's the first point.

Second is that for the Defense Department, the focus of that activity is primarily in support of military operations, planned or undertaken, or their aftermath.

Q So suggestions -- I'm sorry.

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: It is not -- it is the case, at times, that the people who are in (name of briefer)'s organization are seconded to the DCI for operating under the DCI's authority. Okay? That's done.

Q (Off mike) --

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: That's what I'm trying to say.

So that's done on that -- but those things that are being done with respect to the military side of the house are being -- that's what these teams are for. They report to the local commander -- the two-, three-star level -- not to the Secretary of Defense but over to the commander in the field for his purposes.

So where (name of briefer) relayed to you the anecdote of having DHS (sic) people involved in the capture of Hussein, the point is -- just to underscore why we needed this organization -- the fellow who did this and came upon the information that got Hussein was due that day to rotate out of the theater. And there wasn't anybody else coming in behind him.

So the purpose here is to ensure, under the aegis of the DCI in support of the operations of the Department of Defense, that there is an organization that uses human beings to gather intelligence and make it available to the commanders for their operational employment.

Q Did you say he was from DHS?

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Did I say that? (Cross talk.)

MR. DIRITA: The Defense Human Intelligence Service, a component of the DIA.  
(Laughter, cross talk.)

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: No, it's not Homeland Security. (Laughter.)

Q When you say that they're assigned to the combatant commander --

MR. DIRITA: Let me -- hold on, Jim --

Q -- does that include the commander of --

MR. DIRITA: To Jim and Tom, and then we're just going to have to break. I apologize. I wish we had more time.

Q When you say that they're assigned to the combatant commanders, that would include the Special Operations commander?

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: It could be but it's not Special Operations specific. It could well be a Special Operations --

Q And so they could -- under the Special Operations commander, they could operate independently of the regional combatant commanders?

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: They would operate under whatever command relationships existed.

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Yeah. And there's little likelihood that the Special Operations commander, as the lead planner for the war on terrorism and so -- is going to be operating independently -- that is to say without the knowledge or support and coordination of regional combatant commanders. The likelihood of that is about zero.

MR. DIRITA: Let's take this last question.

Q You say that the only thing that has changed in these from the Human Augmentation Teams is the name. Just to understand this, have Human Augmentation Teams been deploying in a similar manner, in the sense of responding to a tasking from a JTF commander or a combatant commander?

SR. DEFENSE OFFICIAL: No. They were proposed for this fiscal year '05 program build, so they never came into being. The name got changed in the process.

MR. DIRITA: Okay, thanks a lot folks. I appreciate it. He's got to be getting up to the Hill.

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