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25 JULY 2003

MEMORANDUM FOR: Secretary of Defense and Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

SUBJECT: Terminology to Describe the Nature of Hostile Force Operations in Iraq

1. (C) **General:** In my 16 July press conference, I described the situation in Iraq as follows: "Certainly we're fighting Ba'thist remnants throughout the country. I believe there's mid-level Ba'athist, Iraqi intelligence service people, Special Security Organization people, Special Republican Guard people that have organized at the regional level in cellular structure and are conducting what I would describe as a classical guerrilla-type campaign against us. It's low intensity conflict, in our doctrinal terms, but it's war, however you describe it." In response to a follow-on question, I used the term "guerrilla tactics." I was later misquoted as using the term "guerrilla war" to describe the fighting in Iraq. While enemy operations in Iraq do fit the DOD definition of "guerrilla warfare," the increasing level of foreign terrorist and jihadist activity limits the applicability of that term (hence my use of guerrilla-type campaign and guerrilla tactics). If the nature of hostile force or our own military operations in Iraq meet the criteria of DOD definitions, however, we should not hesitate to use that terminology. It is important that we distinguish between terms that describe enemy strategy or objectives and terms that describe enemy tactics.

2. (C) **Strategy or Objectives:** Hostile force objectives in Iraq meet the definition of an insurgency because portions of the enemy such as members of the "Party of Return" comprise "an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government (i.e. CPA/IGC) through the use of subversion and armed conflict." Attacks against U.S. personnel and, increasingly, on Iraqis aim to create an impression of Coalition impotence and vulnerability, discourage Iraqi cooperation, incite U.S. forces to conduct operations that offend Iraqi sensibilities, and erode U.S. and Coalition political will. In the near-term, former Ba'ath loyalists represent the most significant threat. We can overstate the degree to which the violence derives from a strategy, however, because the enemy is fractious and much of the violence seems to stem from "expressive terrorism" by Islamic jihadists. Other violence is based in criminal activity. Indeed, the situation in Iraq is inconsistent with the historical experience that the word insurgency evokes in America's collective memory – the Vietnam War. Unlike Vietnam, the Ba'athist enemy lacks significant public support. Because some intelligence analysts believe that there is the possibility of a more coherent insurgency emerging over time,

however, we should not deny ourselves the ability to use the term insurgency in the future. To describe the enemy strategy or objectives we should use language similar to the following: **terrorist strategy to spread fear among the Iraqi people, discredit the efforts of the CPA/IGC, and erode the Coalition's will to fight.**

2. (C) **Tactics:** Although enemy activity fits the definition of guerilla warfare, the increasing level of foreign terrorist and jihadist activity limits the applicability of that term. Guerilla warfare is defined as "military and paramilitary operations conducted in enemy-held or hostile territory by irregular, predominantly indigenous forces." We should use the following terminology to describe tactics: **terrorist attacks and guerilla warfare tactics.** Our tactics therefore would be **counter-terrorist and counter-guerilla.**

3. (C) **Recommendation:** Adopt the above terminology to describe our current understanding of enemy objectives and tactics. In general, however, the more restrictive the terminology we use to describe the fighting in Iraq, the more we risk creating something similar to the "credibility gap" that impeded government and military relations with the press during the Vietnam War. We should particularly guard against any impression that we are trying to minimize or downplay the intensity of the fighting or the challenges we face. Although current operations in Iraq are not analogous to the Korean or Vietnam Wars, we might learn from the public backlash that followed President Truman's description of the Korean War as a "police action" or President Johnson's description of Vietnam as a "different kind of war." We must guard against using euphemisms or excessive qualifiers for the word war or we will open ourselves to criticism and adversarial skepticism. Although it is not our intention, the use of the term "unconventional war," for example, might be equated to LBJ's effort to cast Vietnam as something other than a "real" war. We should also avoid the use of the term "low-intensity conflict" without qualifiers because the conflict is anything but low intensity for those engaged in the fighting.

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