

DoD News Briefing

Tuesday, July 27, 1999 - 1:30 p.m. (EST)

Subject: Secretary of Defense Trip to Asia

Presenter: Rear Admiral Craig Quigley, DASD PA

---

Rear Admiral Quigley: Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen.

For those of you who I have not had the opportunity to meet yet, I'm Rear Admiral Craig Quigley in my third week here as Ken Bacon's new deputy, and I'll be the alternate briefer when Ken is on the road with the Secretary or ill or on vacation or what have you.

I would like to welcome all of the interns, I believe Rowan you brought them here today, correct? At the Washington Times. Aspiring journalists all. Welcome. It's good to have you with us.

This morning I think several of you were over at the change of command where Vice Admiral Thomas Wilson relieved Lieutenant General Patrick Hughes who is retiring. Admiral Wilson will be the 13th Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, and he had most recently served as the Director for Intelligence of the J-2 on the Joint Staff where he's been there about a year and a half, I think, since early 1998.

I have no further announcements this afternoon, and I'll take your questions.

Q: Could you describe the search and rescue efforts underway in Colombia for the RC-7 that went down last week, and the difficulties facing those trying to get to the plane?

Rear Admiral Quigley: We still have a very active search and rescue operation underway for this missing aircraft. It was on a routine counter-drug mission with five Americans and two Colombians on board. That's the way we typically do it. A multinational effort.

The aircraft search continues. We have a variety of both U.S. and Colombian aircraft ongoing. We have found a location where there are aircraft wreckage parts on the side of a mountain, but we have no confirmation that that is the site of the aircraft we're looking for.

The weather, as you mentioned, has been lousy. It has hampered our efforts severely. The wreckage that we have found is somewhere around the 7,000 to 7,500 foot level. It's on the side of a mountain with the slope of the side of that mountain about 45 degrees, so it's very steep. And of course, it's surrounded on all sides by very dense jungle. And I forgot to mention, very hazy and foggy in the area.

So it's a very real hazard to the aviators who are taking part in the search. As soon as we can get down to that site and put people on the ground then we'll know a lot more. We're very anxious to do that, but of course we must wait for the conditions to be safe for the aviators.

Q: Have you heard from the guerrillas that apparently control this area, that they will lay off while you try to do that?

Rear Admiral Quigley: Only press reports, John, in that regard. And public statements that the guerrillas have made through the press that their intentions are indeed to remain clear of the site. We're very anxious to get there. We'll do that as soon as we possibly can.

We have been in contact with the families of all five of the Americans on board, and are keeping them informed as closely as we can as to the progress of our search efforts.

Q: Are you continuing to search for other wreckage? There are a lot of plane crashes that have never been found in Colombia. It's legitimate to say this might not be the site.

Rear Admiral Quigley: Indeed, we have not. There are a variety of, like I said, of U.S. and Colombian aircraft that are still very much actively engaged in this search and we hope rescue operation. So yes, there is a search going of that vicinity, not just focused on that single point, although that's of great interest to us. We want to get down there as quickly as we can.

Q: Is it about the right area?

Rear Admiral Quigley: Yes, we're in the right ballpark.

Q: But at this point you're still thinking of this as a search and rescue rather than just a search and recovery?

Rear Admiral Quigley: Absolutely.

Q: You have reason to believe that there are still survivors?

Rear Admiral Quigley: We have no reason not to, and we will keep our hopes up until facts prove otherwise.

Q: Has the U.S. and Japan reached any kind of an agreement on this missile defense system?

Rear Admiral Quigley: I know the article you're referring to. There is an ongoing discussion between Japan and the United States. As you're very much aware, this is a topic that is of very much interest to both nations and many others around the world.

But what we are actively discussing with the Japanese government now is the technical support or the development of technologies that would be useful in a ballistic missile defense system. What we are not discussing is the actual development or testing or deployment of any such system with the Japanese. But there are a variety of technical disciplines that would contribute to technologies that would be helpful in that regard. That's what we are still working very closely with the Japanese on.

Q: On Korea and Japan. The U.S. is apparently applying a full court press -- Ms. Albright in the ASEAN conferences, Mr. Cohen in Japan -- to persuade the North Koreans not to test another long-range missile. The North Koreans are saying that's their own business. It just seems it's coming to a head. Is there any indication that they may be ready to test irregardless of the pressures?

Rear Admiral Quigley: I can't go into the indications that we may or may not hold as to their preparations for a launch, but I can only emphasize and repeat the words that you have heard numerous U.S. and other world leaders that say it would not be helpful, it would be destabilizing to that region of the world for the North Koreans to pursue that program.

We remain hopeful that that will indeed be the case. I think Secretary Cohen's words on that were serious implications if the North Koreans do pursue such a launch. I think I'll leave it there.

Q: These very serious efforts that are being made, especially by the Defense Secretary, are

they not indicative that there is still some desire, some will on the part of North Korea to test? We wouldn't be doing this if there weren't. Or am I...

Rear Admiral Quigley: I have a hard time predicting what the North Koreans will or won't do. But we do think that if they do pursue this, then it would be very destabilizing to that region, and we're hopeful that they will not do that.

Q: A different question. Yesterday in his OpEd piece in the Washington Post, Secretary Cohen outlined the devastating consequences of a germ attack. He used some very explicit language saying that hospitals would become warehouses for the dead and dying, and that this contagion could spread at an astounding rate.

What was the Secretary's message there in outlining these consequences? Is this a call to arms? Is he trying to get more funding for this? What was, other than scaring people, what was his purpose in writing this?

Rear Admiral Quigley: I think awareness more than anything else. The United States, thank goodness, has never suffered an attack of this nature in our history. We certainly hope that would always be so. But the potential effectiveness of a biological attack against a segment of American society would be devastating, as Secretary Cohen indicated in his OpEd piece in the Post.

This is something that is not on your average American's list of things to worry about on a daily basis, and I think one of his principle motivations in writing that piece was to try to raise the awareness among the American people that this threat is very real, and this is something that we need to consider seriously and keep working on, on a regular basis.

Q: He seems to suggest in this piece that there's really no way to stop this.

Rear Admiral Quigley: There are ways to mitigate this. I don't think anyone's claiming that there's ever going to be a 100 percent effective defense. But education is perhaps our strongest weapon against this, and to raise the people's awareness that the possibility is out there, the technology is readily available, inexpensive and low tech, and this is something that, like I say, the American people have not had to really consider before, but it's very real and it's very much an awareness issue with the Secretary.

Q: Are you aware whether the Pentagon has done any computer modeling or other estimates of what the casualty rate could be from a biological attack?

Rear Admiral Quigley: We've done a lot of modeling over the years in meteorological studies, if you're talking about going back to the development of the nuclear weapons program of the United States and elsewhere, on weather effects -- movement by wind, by rain, by things of that sort. Going downstream or downwind, I should say, of fallout from nuclear weapons. Some of that's applicable to biological and chemical agents, but the movement of a biological agent in people, as people move from one part of the country to another, has nothing to do with weather conditions and that makes it pretty hard to model.

I think that's another point that Secretary Cohen wanted to make was that the ability to spread rapidly in very unpredictable directions is a very real component of our concerns.

Q: One last thing. Normally, when you outline a serious problem like this it's accompanied with some sort of suggestion of what the solution is. What is the solution for defense against a biological attack? There doesn't seem to be one in this article.

Rear Admiral Quigley: Again, you're seeing education. I keep going back to that, but it's very very important that you have a considerable amount of work that has been done over the years by the Defense Department on both nuclear, biological and chemical defense of troops in the field. And that is applicable in some cases.

The very real possibilities, as you see in airports in the United States and train stations and other hubs where people congregate to move from one point to another. We are all told on a regular basis to not leave your briefcase in places, and to be aware of your situation around you. I think that's all part of this, would be to speak up, be aware of your surroundings. Be aware that this can happen in the United States with very, very severe consequences if it does.

The Defense Department and other agencies of the federal government are very, very much involved in this effort to protect as much as we can against the effects of weapons of mass destruction.

Q: At the time of Deutch's report Hamre was kind of skeptical about recommendations to reorganize or reshuffle some things in the Pentagon. Having absorbed that a little bit and having refocused attention on this issue, and also having said that the Pentagon maybe is not as close on this issue as some other ones, is there a sense of anything concrete that the Pentagon needs to do in order to address this issue more?

Rear Admiral Quigley: I think you won't find anybody in this building that will disagree with the statement that we need to work closer together. We need to focus more together as an interagency process on this. You have FEMA, I won't go into all of this, but there are many agencies that have a role to play here, Steve. FEMA, certainly. Justice Department. And the Pentagon in a supporting role.

We would all raise our hands in the air and say yes, we agree with the finding that more needs to be done and ever-closer cooperation needs to take place to really get our arms around this very difficult problem.

Q: It will sound bad the way I'll say it, but is it basically the position that more needs to be done but really somebody else needs to do it because of the nature of the problem?

Rear Admiral Quigley: There are a lot of issues involved here. Not only the safety issues, but legal issues as to what organization should be in the lead. There are laws, the perception that the right agency needs to be in the lead on this and every other issue are very real. This is very much a Justice and FEMA issue, and the role that the Department of Defense finds itself in support. We think we can contribute to that in a very meaningful way. We think it ought to be in that order.

Q: What's the main military threat facing Taiwan from China right now? There's obviously lots of tension and there's been some assessments in the past I gather of China's probable lack of the kind of amphibious capability to really pose a threat. What is the U.S., the Pentagon assessment of the threat right now if this situation were to get worse?

Rear Admiral Quigley: Well, that's a tough one to try to quantify. For starters, I need to go back and say that this is to reinforce the U.S.' one China policy. That is something we've adhered to for many years. That is not different today.

I think that the discussions that have been going on now between Taiwan and China need to

continue, and I think everyone would agree that the volume needs to be turned down a little bit. But we have seen nothing that shows a direct military threat to Taiwan today from any direction.

Press: Thank you.