

Military Analyst Call
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Room 2E572

██████████ – review of Iraqi Security Forces

Host: Eric Ruff, Tara Jones OSD-PA

ON THE RECORD

Transcriber: Murphy

Mr. Ruff: (intro in progress). So with that ██████████ will open up with a couple of minutes just to sort of set the stage. It is all on the record. And then he'll obviously take your questions. So general, if you'd like to start off, fire away.

██████████ Well let me sort of give a very quick summary of what I talked about with the Pentagon press corps. And the bottom line up front with them was that there has been enormous progress with Iraqi Security Forces over the course of the past 16 months, in the face of a brutal insurgency. There is clearly considerable work still to be done.

But with whatever metric you want to have, Iraqi readiness has continued to grow with each passing week. In fact, you could take a percentage off each of them: training, equipping, infrastructure, reconstruction, units in the fight, branch schools, academies, you name it, and what has been accomplished would still be very, very substantial.

The number of trained and equipped, by the way now, is over 197,000, and that should be, in fact, close to about 200,000 by the referendum in mid October.

To give a few numbers for you: There are over 115 police and army combat battalions in the fight. I've added the police – that's the police commandos, the public order battalions, the police mechanized unit and the emergency response unit to that. Sometimes only combat were reported as when Gen. Casey was talking about some 80-plus last week.

Now most of these 115 – about 80 – are assessed at being Level 3. That is – the title for that is "fighting alongside" in this transition readiness report that we've discussed with some of you before.

Over 36 are assessed as being Level 2 or above. Of course the above is that one – lone one that is at Level 1 which is truly - fully independent. And I think a very important point to make is that that does not just mean that it is capable of independent operations, which has been talked about a bit, not completely correctly. Any unit Level 2 and above generally can conduct independent operations, and in fact as evidence of that a substantial number of the 36 have their own areas of responsibilities. Seven battalions in Baghdad alone have their own areas of operation. And it is of course when they have their own area of operation that they can in fact replace U.S. forces and allow them to move elsewhere or eventually to go home.

I don't want to try to create an impression that these are right now candidates for the 101st Airborne or the 1st Marine Division, but they have come a very, very long way in a relatively short period of time in the face of a brutal insurgency, an enemy who's tried everything to disrupt and derail the establishment of these forces, the reconstruction of their infrastructure and the delivery of their equipment.

Again, it is not surprising that very, very few Iraqi battalions are assessed at Level 1 – that means fully independent. Again, not just capable of fully independent operations, but of requiring no Coalition assistance in any form. Now they would still have a transition team with them, but nothing else. And in fact what has happened is because either a reassessment of a unit, perhaps because of personnel change, or in one case a unit moving to a location in which it doesn't appear to be as independent as it was. One of the units is on Haifa Street. That unit's still doing a tremendous job, but for some reason or other the transition team leader and his Iraqi counterpart

moved them from 1 to 2. They are still in the lead; they still own their area of responsibility; they have still replaced U.S. forces; but there is an assessment that in fact they are not fully independent and they probably need assistance in some area of logistics or perhaps in support from the ministry because of their challenges and capacity and capability, intel structures and so forth, all of which we are working to help the Iraqis improve.

There has been enormous progress in development of institutions. The latest such example of that is on the 25th of September, the junior and senior staff colleges did open on time, with NATO support. That was a NATO mission, and you'll recall I was the training mission commander in Iraq as well as the Multi-National Security Transition Commander-Iraq.

That is very, very important to them because it will start to provide the staff skills and trained staff officers that will be so essential at the higher headquarters of the brigade and division level as those organizations come on line.

Repair of the infrastructure has gone continually very, very well. Hundreds of police stations now, over 100 border forts, dozens of army bases – at least four of which can hold entire divisions, at least light divisions – the Ministry of Defense building, military police academies, training facilities and so forth. All of that proceeding very, very well, albeit with some challenges and a few very tough areas in Anbar province or in a place like Samarrah.

The development – delivery of equipment has been enormous as well. We're now up to 220,000 sets of body armor delivered, over 30,000 radios, over 186,000 AK-47s, over 330 million rounds of ammunition and nearly 20,000 vehicles delivered just since 1 July last year.

The focus now increasingly is on providing more armored protection, and in fact, there are two mechanized brigades now -- one each in the police and the army. Another mechanized army brigade is in training. We're starting the transition of the Iraqis into the new armored security vehicles on the police side made by Cadillac Gage (sp) in the U.S., and about to – have made a purchase, waiting the delivery of up-armored HUMVEES, and then we'll make a purchase shortly of wheeled armored personnel carriers, most likely will be non-U.S., but we'll equip three full brigades of Iraqi forces.

Now there are other factors than just the development of the forces themselves that will be very important, including the development of a political environment that is in much of the south and in the Kurdish areas results in support for Iraqi forces and denies the insurgents sanctuary and assistance; a reduction in unemployment would help as that would reduce the number of potential Iraqi guns for hire; more assistance from neighboring countries in restricting the flow of foreign fighters and suicide bombers would be of enormous importance, and so would, of course, improvements in the government's provision of basic services, which would undermine the efforts of the insurgents to discredit it.

The key to what much of what lies ahead, in fact, will be Iraqi leaders at the national and provincial levels, as well in the ministries and the security forces themselves. And the developments of the next several months will be critical as the constitutional referendum and the general elections are held, and then as a new government, which of course will be the fourth in about 18 months, is formed.

So as a bottom, bottom line, let me just say that Iraqi Security Force capabilities, numbers, readiness have been moving steadily upward. I'd urge that we widen the aperture to focus on Level 2 and above, because that's the all-important level at which Iraqi forces can replace U.S. forces.

The Iraqis are in this fight. They are fighting and dying for their country, and they are fighting increasingly well. And now I'd be happy to take your questions.

Q: Hey, Dave. This is Jeff McCausland. First of all, welcome home.

█ Thanks. Great to be back.

Q: I would like to add one more thing. I am here in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. There is an Iraqi officer attending the Army War College this year.

█ That is super, and there's one, by the way, at the Command General Staff College as well, and there are others all around the world. In fact, one of the other myths is that the Iraqis are not taking advantage of training offers around the world. And in fact, there are typically 3,200 or so Iraqi Security Force members outside the country. Certainly the bulk of those, about 3,100, are in Jordan, either at the police academy or at the 13-week special operator course. But there are others, such as the one you mentioned, others in the United States. I think there's one even going to West Point.

And by the way, beyond that, I should have mentioned, there are now short-, mid-, and long-range plans that are guiding the development of these forces, and that is something new in the last six months or so, developed with the Iraqis, because as you would rightly point out I think, if you want somebody to graduate from the Military Academy, West Point let's say, five years from now, you've got to start now with language training and the rest. And so that type of investment is being made, is ongoing, and that will continue to be made even as the focus understandably is on how many are fighting today, when are they going to start taking over from U.S. forces, and when will the logistical apparatus and all that we're helping to make improve come on line.

Q: Let me get to my question. My question is really two quick ones. First is, talk just a little bit about recruitment Dave, because there has been a concern by some people that how well are we doing in ensuring that these are truly integrated battalions. And last week when I was in the U.K., there was a lot of concern about Shi'as, infiltration, and are we just arming for the civil war.

And second, something you alluded to, I think I'd like you to develop – the assessments, this category one, two, three and four. Is this a joint assessment by Iraqi leaders, the unit and their counterparts? Or is this solely a U.S. assessment of the Iraqi units? So those are my two questions.

█ All right. The goal is a joint assessment. I believe that is the case in just about all of the units out there. I can't testify to that. But again, the idea is for the transition team leader to sit down with his Iraqi counterpart – typically battalion commander, of course – although we have transition teams, as I think you know, 10-man transition teams with every brigade headquarters, division headquarters, ground-force headquarters – actually larger there, the joint headquarters, and then in a variety of the Minister of the Interior counterparts as well. And by the way we now have – MNSTCI (Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq) now has responsibility of the two ministries, which was something that they've just picked up. So it is a joint assessment.

In terms of the recruiting, there was indeed a retention and recruiting challenge with Sunni Arabs last fall, and probably what – through February or so. That was a result of the enormous intimidation, in particular in places like western Ninevah province and Anbar province.

The Sunni imams in the early spring put out a fatwah that said it's the duty of every good Sunni Arab male to serve in the security forces, and there has been no shortage of Sunni Arab volunteers since then. There have been challenges in signing them up at times because the insurgents will target any recruiting effort. That has not in the least prevented recruiting of these forces, and with the national forces, and I need to distinguish, Jeff, between the national forces which would be army units, particularly those that are moved around the country, there is an effort to make sure that they reflect the national population, which would mean that they would certainly have some 20 percent or so Sunni Arabs. That's true in some units, but it needs to be improved in a number of others, because in fact for a while, Shi'a and to a lesser degree Kurds were the

ones that were volunteering. Again, that has long since been a thing of the past, but it then takes time if you have a 13-week program to train an infantryman, for example, which is the training for an individual volunteer now, individual replacement, and there's a unit development model as well which takes a little less than that time. Again, it takes time for them to actually get out into the field and to populate these units.

The challenges in the south – and then there are local forces. And the police of course are locally recruited, nationally trained, and the police academies that now have a capacity well over 7,000 at a time, in addition to hundreds in specialty training in any given time.

But those forces, because they are recruited locally, reflect the local population. And of course there have been issues with conflicted loyalties that emerged in the latest dustup down in Basra. I will tell you as a general principal that I think Iraqis can deal with those -- in general -- and I think they did in the end. There will be drama, there may even be fisticuffs, bloodshed, but in general, I think that they can still deal with the situations in the south. And by the way, in Najaf and Karbala, I think you all saw – I hope you all saw recently that those areas were actually handed off to Iraqi Security Forces, as many other areas in the south either have been or tacitly are, because what you see when you drive around in Kut, Hillah, Karbala, Najaf, Nasiriyah, Samawah, whatever, what you see are Iraqi police and Iraqi army soldiers, and they are the face of security in those – and in Basra, by the way.

So, again, big effort to make national forces -- the police units and the army units reflect the national population with the emphasis most on those that are most deployable, the intervention force – 1st, 3rd, 5th and 9th divisions and to make sure that the loyalties of the local forces are still in a sense, if you will, to the national chain of command and not to some local militia leader.

Q: Thank you.

■ Yep.

Q: Dave, Ken Allard. I want to welcome you home.

■ Hello, Ken, how are you doctor? Good to talk to you.

Q: Well listen, I just literally walked off the set up here. But my question is, can you assess the leader development process for us? I know that's probably one of the more difficult aspects of this whole thing. But how competent are these guys? How competent are they getting? And how close are they to actually being able to fight on their own?

■ Yep. It varies enormously, Ken, to be absolutely up front. There are some exceedingly competent Iraqi leaders. And you put your finger on the right question because, in fact, leaders matter enormously in this effort. This is, you know, the loud speaker culture, if you will. It is a culture that for 30 years has been used to responding to orders from the tower, if you will, from the top.

And so leaders matter enormously. And there is an effort to reestablish the leader development institutions – the military academy has over 500 cadets, for example. It's the Sandhurst model. They've already had their first graduation. The staff colleges that I just mentioned. Again, that's more in the dozens for each of the junior and senior staff courses. There are non-commissioned officer courses that have begun. The squad leader platoon sergeant and then next it will be first sergeant. There are also local – what we would know as PLDC or a cross between PLDC and B-NOC (ph). And that's where the transition teams and also mobile training teams that we have that are going around to develop not just leader skills, if you will, but also staff skills.

Now again, it varies enormously. When you have someone who is a former staff college graduate, and you know that because they have a red stripe on their rank, and they're called staff

major, colonel, general – you really do have somebody that has a good entry level and already a good degree of knowledge about how to do professional military planning and operations.

In other cases you don't have that. In some cases you have people that never had the opportunity to go to it, such as former peshmerga officers – by the way, by and large though what has been recruited for the Iraqi army is former officers from the Iraqi army, but culled out so that you've got the best and brightest of the old army and not those for whom it was just a jobs program.

So I guess the short answer again, Ken, would be that it is uneven, that it is improving because of the effort and investment being made in leader development. By the way, you'll be happy to hear me, we are literally forming an Iraqi TRADOC and an Iraqi national defense university. And I'm sure that I will write back and help them figure out how to do a combined arms center and command as well.

But, you know, all of that effort is out there. But I was just asked about, you know, how long will it take to develop an NCO corps. And I'd ask, you know, how long did it take us to develop an NCO corps, and we were much more predisposed to it, and knew what it used to look like, and had muscle memory about that. In some cases, this will take generational change, if you will.

And so with -- to all of you, this is not just a sweetness and light picture. It is a realistic picture that does, though, say that Iraqis should get enormous credit for what they have accomplished since the transition to sovereignty, while recognizing that there is still a great deal of work to be done, and that's true in this area as well.

Q: General, Jed Babbin. Can you take the flip side of that question and address whether you have a measure for how the Iraqi Security Forces are being accepted by the population, the local sheiks, and all the rest of them. How are they getting along with all the people?

█ The – first of all we actually have metrics, by the way. I know there has been some discussion in a sense that, gosh, they need more metrics. I really need somebody to come over – or need them to go over now, and see all the metrics that Multi-National Force-Iraq has. As you would expect, the ORSA (ph) pods in the U.S. military are having a field day, and they have metrics on everything. And one of the metrics is in fact basically a question about support of the military. And the military remains generally either the most or among the most respected institutions – the Army in particular. There is less support and respect for the police because of their historic status as much less credible, I guess, or the pride in those organizations was historically less, and it still is.

In general, though, Iraqi Security Forces are accepted more than, you know, Coalition forces, with the exception of locations where they perceive or want to perceive that it is forces of another ethnic group that are trying to impose their will on them. There have been accusations, for example, that it is Shi'a that is going into Anbar province. Well, the fact of the matter is that those units that were developed in the period when Sunni Arabs were not volunteering are predominantly Shi'a, and they have come out of the pipeline, and many of them have gone into Anbar province.

Now there's also a number of the more experienced units from -- all of the intervention force battalions, by the way, all 12 of the intervention force battalions are in Anbar province, now, most of them in eastern – Fallujah, Ramadi, but there are now also small numbers of battalions out in the western part. And I think a rough number is somewhere around 3,000 are actually in these operations – these three or four operations that have just begun.

But – and in those cases there is of course resistance. I think the answer to that, candidly, is well, you had your chance, you were allowed to develop the Fallujah brigade, you were allowed to stand up Iraqi national guard battalions from your local areas, and candidly in Anbar province in particular they proved over time ineffective, and they were in fact disestablished, and their

members were recruited though as part of this reach out outreach to Sunni Arabs to serve as individual replacements in the national forces.

So again, you can go anywhere and find any data point, but as a generalization, I think they are generally accepted, although you can find places where again, one ethnic group feels that another ethnic group's force is in there.

Q: [REDACTED] it's Walt Slocomb. First of all, welcome home, and thanks for everything you've done.

[REDACTED] Well thank you, Walt, and you were noted conspicuously by your absence at the 75th anniversary of the Woodrow Wilson school this past weekend. We need an explanation for this.

Q: No excuse.

[REDACTED] OK, sir.

Q: My question is about the – you said that the Coalition military now has responsibility for the MOD as well as the military forces themselves. Can you say a little bit about how the development of the Ministry of Defense is going? And the Ministry of Interior?

[REDACTED] The Ministry of Defense actually has probably developed more rapidly than the Ministry of Interior, in part because of what you and your colleagues did, frankly. Although it has had its challenges, and there were challenges over time in providing the quantity of advisors that were needed to some degree the right skill sets in those advisors as well, but and it did in fact experience under the previous minister and with some previous directors general an apparent degree of corruption there. I don't believe anywhere near the tune of \$1 billion; I think \$1 billion was in fact, spent on equipment, some of which amount apparently, allegedly, although again some of the folks making the alleging are from another government and want to make some points that some of that ended up in the director general's pocket or some other pockets.

But the challenge is that the capacity and capability are still relatively thin. And there is a sense that it would be a good idea to unify the effort at the ministry advisor level as well as that the joint headquarters level, which was MNSTCI, and that perhaps MNSTCI could bring to bear capabilities to augment what was already being done at the ministry.

And I'll be candid with you and say that, you know, had I been responsible for that, you know, we had a guy from Goldman Sachs for example, a reservist – a vice president from Goldman Sachs who we probably would have thrown at the finance director general within the Ministry of Defense had it been our area, but in fact, as you know, it was not. And so we did offer over time, in fact we actually contracted – Roy Auckle (sp) is back over there, by the way, a lot of you will be happy to hear, and to augment that effort. But I think that's probably the right thing to do, and I think that substantively there will be a better synergy in a sense between MNSTCI and the advisor effort than perhaps otherwise.

Again, the key – the twin – the key words that I mentioned are capacity and capability. And in fact discussed this earlier this morning with some others that we really need to focus not just on the ministries of Interior and Defense; we've gotten I think good attention in that area in part because I think the secretary of defense has been quite outspoken in the interagency, but it's other ministries now that will also become critical.

You know, again, it's not just the Iraqi Security Forces period. I mentioned also these other factors that are important – but yet another one is, just to take an example, the challenge with pay and the Ministry of Interior is not really within the Ministry of Interior when it emerges, it typically is in the Ministry of Finance. They could actually finance the pay if they could do a reprogramming action and the bureaucracy so far has made that challenging. I think they will solve it in the end; I think they will get a supplemental they have asked for. But if you - you could fix these other two

ministries, develop enormous capacity and capability but if you then don't also fix the Ministry of Finance, which of course does the paying and the budgeting and the provision of resources – because sometimes it's not enough to have the money on paper, you have to have it in this culture as you know – in the Iraqi culture – it has to literally be there in the bank or in the safe to actually be spent.

And then I would say, you know, the Ministry of Oil, which is generating still some \$500 million a week for Iraq, but could again probably do even better than that with additional assistance. So I think we have to look very, very hard.

I mentioned these very key events that are coming up mid-October, mid-December. Let's not forget there is another one after that, and that is the formation of the new government, which is critical. And that will be (inaudible – of course?) be the fourth government in 18 months. Certainly there will be some falloff at least, you know, in terms of some knowledge of the job unless everybody just stays in the same place, which would be unlikely. And the challenge will be in a sense keeping the civilians in there, the civil service that the embassy and others and we were trying to help develop in the various ministries through these transitions and keeping of course the military leaders. And they did do that this past transition. And again, that will be an important point in the next transition.

I think one more question, and then they are giving me the hook.

Q: [REDACTED] this is Barry Posen (sp). How are you doing?

[REDACTED] Hey Barry, how are you? It's good to see – by the way, I do want to note that you were at the Woodrow Wilson school.

Q: And I didn't even graduate from it.

[REDACTED] And you didn't. But you did teach there. And you did mentor a few of us. So all that I say is your responsibility.

Q: Yeah, right. Blame me. Dave, I would like to ask you to go back to the question of retention in the Iraqi military. You didn't get a chance to talk quite enough about that. I am curious, what's the rate at which Iraqis that have been trained up are separating themselves from the military? At what rate –

[REDACTED] I don't think that I can even give a general characterization, other than to say it was a major concern to me last November through about February, probably, which was the height of the Sunni Arab intimidation. And it has ceased being a problem by and large. There are some units that we have kept our eye on. I remember just before leaving, it looked as if a unit was starting – but I mean now we are talking about – it was starting to dip below 90 percent, Barry, so I mean that is not what we were dealing with back in November when that same unit, you know, we were struggling to keep it above 45 percent.

So I think it's a different – very, very different issue right now. In general, most units are actually above 100 percent. In fact if anything, the pressure has to be to keep them below about 110 to 115, because everybody wants to be part of the Iraqi Security Forces right now.

Again, there is absolutely no shortage of volunteers. And I think you've seen even when, you know, when a recruiting station will – or an attempt will be made to blow it up, and they typically will get as far as the outer entry control point. But there will still be people there. And you know, we have yet to figure out how you completely protect – I mean somebody has to do the first search in all these locations. But the next day they will be lined back up.

I mean there's an anecdote I remember from the police commando recruiting late last year, early this year, where the insurgents attacked the entry control point where they were doing recruiting for the police commandos. A lot of them were taken to the hospital, and a fairly large number of them actually came back, all bandaged up, and when they were asked by the police commando leader, what do you guys want, they said we still want to be commandos.

So there's a pretty substantial desire to be part of the Iraqi Security Forces. The motivation certainly does include the fact that it's a great job, and it's a government job, which is the coin of the realm in Iraq, it pays a good salary. But also when you scratch at them a bit, there is also sort of a quiet response that if I don't do this, who will? And there is a sense of fighting for one's country, and it does include more than just the Shi'a Arabs, which of course are the majority party right now.

And with that, let me just say thanks to all of you for assembling on short notice. I hope that's been helpful to you. And all the best to everybody, and we hope to see a lot of you out at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, or at one of the other bases or training centers that CAC (sp) is responsible for.

Air assault!

Q: Thanks [REDACTED]