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**Presenter: Gen. George Casey, Commander, Multinational Force Iraq and November 08, 2004 1:00 PM EST**  
**Bryan Whitman, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs**

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**DoD Briefing - Iraq Security Forces and Multinational Forces Offensive Actions in Fallujah, Iraq**

Monday, November 8, 2004 1:03 p.m. EST

DoD Briefing - Iraq Security Forces and Multinational Forces Offensive Actions in Fallujah, Iraq

Via Teleconference from Iraq

GEN. CASEY: Okay, thank you very much. Hello, everyone. Nice to be with you tonight. Let me just give you a short overview here, and then I'll take your questions.

Tonight, Iraqi security and coalition forces kicked off offensive operations to eliminate the terrorist and insurgent safe haven in Fallujah and to restore control to the Iraqi government. Our forces are well prepared, well trained, well led, and ready. The operation will liberate the people of Fallujah and begin the reconstruction of the city and the restoration of normal life. The interim Iraqi government has developed plans for humanitarian, medical, and reconstruction support, and the government has designated specific ministers to oversee the different aspects of the plan.

Operations began last night to isolate the city. The attack up the western peninsula was led by an Iraqi commando unit to establish government control over the Fallujah General Hospital. A Marine unit secured the two bridges that deny westward movement from Fallujah, while other units completed the isolation of Fallujah throughout the night. All of yesterday's objectives were achieved on or ahead of schedule.

As you know, Fallujah has been the center of terrorist and insurgent activity in Iraq. It has been used as a planning, staging, and logistics base for foreign fighters and the Iraqi insurgents that support them. From Fallujah they have exported terror across Iraq against all Iraqis. As we have seen in Najaf, Tall Afar, Samarra and Thawra, the Iraqi people are fighting to throw off the mantle of terror and intimidation so that they can elect their own government and get on with building a better life for all Iraqis. Elimination of Fallujah as a terrorist safe haven will go a long way in helping them achieve these goals.

If I could, I'd just like to say a few brief words for the home audience.

As a nation, you can take great pride in the role that our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines are playing in helping build a new Iraq. Each and every one of them recognizes the importance that successfully accomplishing this mission holds for our security, and each and every one of them makes a difference here every day. Wherever I go, I see their acts of bravery, compassion and selflessness, and I couldn't be prouder of these wonderful men and women.

The fight in Fallujah will be a tough one and there will be other tough fights in our time here, but nothing worthwhile is ever easy, and the challenge of helping 25 million Iraqis build a better future is one that the Iraqi people and the armed forces of more than 30 freedom-loving nations are clearly up to.

Thank you. As I said, I'll be happy to take your questions. I think you understand that we've just kicked off the operation, and so I won't talk about the future operations, and I'll be very conscious of OPSEC, but I'll do my best to answer your questions.

Okay, Bryan, go ahead.

MR. WHITMAN: Go ahead and start.

Q General, Charlie Aldinger with Reuters. Can you hear me? (Off mike.) I'd like to ask if you could give us just a few details on this. Is there a name for this operation? And numbers have been bandied around -- 10,000, 15,000. Could you tell us how many U.S. troops and Iraqi troops are involved? Whether other troops are involved? And how long do you expect this will take, reasonably? Thank you.

GEN. CASEY: Charlie, the name of the operation is an Arabic name. It's called -- it's al-Fajr. And it's the Iraqi word for dawn. And the Iraqi prime minister suggested this -- selected this for obvious reasons.

Your numbers, I don't want to talk specifics about numbers, Charlie. Your numbers are in the right ballpark. I don't want to give too many specifics about the size of the force or expected duration of the operation.

Q That about 15,000, would you say, is that in the ballpark, the total?

GEN. CASEY: Yeah, I think -- what did you say, 10,000 to 15,000?

Q Yes, sir, or 15,000.

GEN. CASEY: You're in the ballpark, Charlie.

Q And are there more American troops than Iraqi troops involved, sir?

GEN. CASEY: There are, Charlie.

(Short audio break.)

MR. WHITMAN: Go ahead, Bob.

Q General, this is Bob Burns from Associated Press. You said in your opening remarks that the goal is to eliminate Fallujah as a terrorist safe haven. To what extent do you believe that the insurgents who were in Fallujah have to some extent slipped away to already set up again in Ramadi or somewhere else in that area?

GEN. CASEY: I think -- we've been watching this fairly closely for a time. I think there are people that have moved out. I think there are people that have moved in. And so we expect that we will have a fight in there

over the next few days, but I -- as I said, I do believe some have relocated already to other places, but others have come in.

MR. WHITMAN: Over here. Martha?

Q General Casey, Martha Raddatz from ABC. When you say how many have left, how many have -- just that some left, some have come in, can you give us any sort of estimates, first of all, how many people remain in Fallujah, civilians, fighters? How many civilians have left and how many enemy have left?

GEN. CASEY: Martha, I -- we don't -- I don't have a specific number on the numbers of enemy that have left. I can tell you that we look at the population of Fallujah. It's just -- it's over 200,000, the normal population. Our projections are that it's somewhere in the range of 50 (percent) to 70 percent of the population has moved out. I've heard estimates as high as 90 percent. Our estimates are that, again, 50 (percent) to 70 percent of the population has departed. That is borne out by heat signatures and generator signatures that we observe there during darkness. That's about as good an estimate as I can give you on what's there inside of Fallujah.

Q Can you be more specific about who's left? Have leaders left? Do you have any clue at this point whether Zarqawi might still be in Fallujah? Just sort of -- have sort of the local fighters left, the insurgents, the terrorists? Who's left, and does that include the leadership?

GEN. CASEY: As you're suggesting, it's a pretty amorphous group of insurgents and terrorists. You know, there's not -- aside from the Zarqawi group, there is not, you know, one single group that is in overall charge. And obviously they operate in small cells, in groups, so it's very difficult to track. And then a lot of the reporting, as you can imagine, comes from human intelligence sources that tell you what they think they know, and you hear reports about so-and-so left Fallujah today and went here, and other reports that say, well, now he's back in Fallujah. So it's a constant -- it's constantly changing, but I do believe that some of the key leaders will stay there and will fight with their soldiers.

MR. WHITMAN: Back to Pam Hess, and then we'll go over to John.

Q General Casey, this is Pam Hess with United Press International. One of the things that happened after the last battle for Fallujah is that the city became a -- both a tactical and a psychological center for the insurgency. How are you going to mitigate that possibility after this battle? How do you take into account the risk that even if you score an overwhelming victory there that you're not creating a situation that's going to draw even more people to the insurgency? And what kind of concrete plans do you have to address that?

GEN. CASEY: I think the big difference, Pam, between April and now is the fact that there is an interim Iraqi government, and the interim government, as you may have seen Prime Minister Allawi on television today -- has bent over backwards to try to resolve this situation in Fallujah peacefully, and they are not able to do that. And they are the ones that are constantly reaching out to all Iraqis in an attempt to bring them into the political process. And that's the big difference between now and the last time that we did an operation in Fallujah, is the fact that the Iraqis are in charge and they are trying very hard to pull all of the Iraqis into the political process.

I also mentioned the work that the Iraqi government has been doing in planning for the humanitarian, medical and reconstruction support. And they've designated ministers to be in charge of the efforts. And they understand that if they are going to sustain this, they have to demonstrate that the people of Iraq are better supporting the government than they are in supporting the terrorists. And rebuilding Fallujah and helping the people in Fallujah realize the benefits of a better life are very high on the government's list of things to do.

The last thing I'd say to you -- and we've seen this again in Najaf and Samarra and Tall Afar -- but it will take a security presence for a while until a well-trained Iraqi security force can take over the presence in Fallujah and maintain security so that the insurgents don't come back, as they have tried to do in every one of the cities

that we have thrown them out of.

Q An American security presence?

GEN. CASEY: No, not necessarily. It will likely be a mix for a while. And what we have done in all of the other cities is as Iraqi security forces that are capable of maintaining order come up and are ready, we hand a portion of the city off to them, and we move out to the outside.

MR. WHITMORE: John?

Q General, it's John Hendren at the L.A. Times. We've often been told that the future of Iraq rests on the shoulders of their security forces. How have they performed leading up to this battle and in the early hours? And I ask this in particular because there was an NPR report that one Iraqi battalion shrunk from over 500 men down to 170 over the past week as they prepared for battle.

GEN. CASEY: I don't know if that last report is true. I've not heard those numbers.

Let me just go back. There are a good number of Iraqi battalions involved in this operation. In Najaf, there were two. In Samarra, there were about five. There are more than that involved in this operation. In both Najaf and Samarra, the Iraqi security forces performed well. Everything I have seen of the forces, during the preparations for this operation, has indicated to me that these forces will perform well in this operation. I have -- one of the brigades is the brigade of the Iraqi intervention force and they have fought in Najaf. They're seasoned forces, and again, I expect them to perform very well.

The other thing is that their brigade and division commanders here are also with them, and so we have Iraqi leadership involved directing Iraqi forces here during the operation.

MR. WHITMAN: Over here to Jamie.

Q General, Jamie McIntyre from CNN. Assuming that Fallujah works out as well as you hope, what more remains to be done between now and January so that elections -- credible elections can be held in Iraq?

GEN. CASEY: Jamie, as you know, we're fighting a counterinsurgency operation here, so there's a range of political, economic and military tasks that need to be accomplished between now and then. The primary thing that we need to do is to continue to generate Iraqi security forces on the -- at the pace that we are -- the plan to generate them on.

Right now, there are -- up until the end of October, there were six Iraqi battalions in the Iraqi army. Now there are 12. By the time that we get to the election, there will be 27.

Right now we have about 40 National Guard units. They're not all fully trained and fully equipped. There will be -- we will have 45 fully trained and equipped by the elections. The police, the border guards, everyone else will continue to grow.

Between the end of September and the election, we are going to add about another 45(,000) or 50,000 Iraqi security forces to the Iraqi theater here. So that -- we will continue to do that. We'll continue to get them seasoned, and that's the first thing.

The second thing is to continue with our economic development. In June, at the end of June, we were only at less than 250 projects started. At the end of October, we were up over 800, to the tune of about \$2-1/2 billion worth of new starts. That's putting more people to work, getting people a paycheck and giving them less incentive to join up with the insurgents.

An example: Today in Thawra, in Sadr City, they just began the reconstruction as a result of the large weapons turn-in program that they just had. Eight thousand people were put to work today, working on the sewer system there in Thawra. That's the kind of activity that we need.

And then the last piece -- and probably, from a military perspective, the most important piece -- is, we have to take apart the former regime element insurgency, and we have to get after their leadership, we have to get after their money, we have to get after their operational communications. But the former regime element insurgency is the greatest threat to the accomplishment of our strategic objectives, and we'd have to get after them and disrupt them to a level that they cannot sustain the levels of violence that we're facing right now in January.

Q A quick follow-up, General. Do you expect the insurgents to regroup in another stronghold somewhere else in Iraq?

GEN. CASEY: I suspect they'll try, Jamie, but I don't know that we'll let them. Right -- you know, we have to eliminate the safe haven. Yes, they'll go off to other places and try to get set up, but when they're doing that, they have to look over their shoulder, they have to worry about who's at the door, they have to put guards out all the time. It's not like you're in a secure area. And so we feel that eliminating their ability to have a place where everybody can come in and work and meet and plan and prepare unmolested is very important to us defeating them.

MR. WHITMAN: Jim, and then over to Bill.

Q General Casey, Jim Miklaszewski with NBC. By your own estimate, there may be as many as 100,000 civilians still inside Fallujah. How will U.S. forces be able to avoid inflicting large numbers of civilian casualties? And if there are, is there a danger you could win the battle for Fallujah but lose the larger war of public opinion in Iraq? And along that line, as you fight in Fallujah, what steps are being taken to wage that -- the information war in terms of knocking down potential propaganda from the insurgency or foreign fighters?

GEN. CASEY: Thank you. Let me talk about a couple of things here.

Again, some of you may have heard Prime Minister Allawi's remarks. He announced the specifics of a state of emergency in Fallujah. One of the first elements of that announcement was telling, as they put it, the good people of Fallujah to stay home, not get out on the streets, and all pedestrian movement is strictly prohibited and there would be a curfew. And so we are reinforcing that with our means of communication, telling people stay at home, stay away from the windows and we will do everything we can to ensure that you're not caught in the line of fire here.

The second thing, and I think you know this, but we have a very disciplined targeting process that's designed to strike valid military targets and to avoid collateral damage and unnecessary loss of life, and we take this responsibility very carefully. On the other hand, and I think you all also know this, that the terrorists don't abide by those rules. And we are -- have geared ourselves to expect their propaganda, and we've seen it continuously as we've gone after targets in the Zarqawi network there in Fallujah, where reports coming out of the hospital bear no resemblance to what we physically see going on on the ground.

I think today, for example, Prime Minister Allawi showed some charts at his press conference that were from a plan that was found in the Fallujah mayor's office for the defense of Fallujah, and it specifically says that they -- the defenders of Fallujah intend to use mosques, schools and other sensitive areas to store supplies and defend from. So as you said, we do expect propaganda, and we are geared up with the Iraqis to get these reports and to rebut them as quickly and as rapidly as possible with accurate information.

Q Yes, Bill Gertz, Washington Times. General, you mentioned that the insurgents have a cellular structure. Could you elaborate a bit on what kind of resistance the coalition forces are going to face, how they're placed within the city, and what kind of weapons they have?

GEN. CASEY: In general terms, they have a range of weapons from AK-47s and machine-guns, rocket-propelled grenades, some heavier anti-aircraft-type machine-guns. But the weapons of choice for them are going to be the improvised explosive devices and the car bombs. And all our intelligence is telling us that they have lined the streets with the -- some of the streets with the improvised explosive devices, much like we saw in Najaf and Thawra. And they have also placed car bombs around the city, and we expect them to come at us with car bombs, you know, as they're driving through the city now. As part of the decree, the Iraqi government has banned vehicular movement inside Fallujah as one of the ways to help protect our troops against this.

What we have generally seen is there's an outer-crust of the defense, and then our estimates tell us that they will probably fall back toward the center of the city where there will be probably a major confrontation. I don't want to get much more specific about what we know about that.

Q Okay. And in terms of numbers, the figure of about 3,000 insurgents has been out there. Can you comment on that, the accuracy of that?

GEN. CASEY: I would tell you that's probably in the ballpark.

MR. WHITMAN: Let's go over here to Ivan.

Q General, Ivan Scott, WTOP Radio, and many major market radio stations across the country. (Scattered laughter.) Thank you.

I want to just define one thing, if I may. Last night's operation seemed to be a kind of a probing operation, in addition to taking the hospital. You talk about Charlie's figure of 10 to 15,000 troops. Without violating opsec, are these troops now going to be engaged in a major frontal assault on the city, or will you again try to hold down casualties, realizing that the casualty rate in urban warfare can be as high as 60 percent? Will you try and hold them down by smaller units operating?

GEN. CASEY: I wouldn't characterize last night's attack as a probing attack. We knew exactly what it was we wanted to do last night, and we went in and did it very quickly. As I mentioned, we accomplished last night's objectives well ahead of schedule.

We will always plan to accomplish our objectives while minimizing the casualties. I guess I'm not -- I've lost the thread of your question here.

Q What I was asking, General, is that are you moving forward with a main force of this 10 to 15,000 figure that you agreed to, or are you going in in smaller units in an attempt to hold down collateral casualties and U.S. and coalition casualties?

GEN. CASEY: I'd rather not say. I think it will become apparent to folks over the next several hours, if not the end of the morning.

Q Thank you.

Q Michelle Kellerman (sp) with National Public Radio. I just want to just follow up quickly on this issue of defections, and I wonder what kind of reports you're hearing about whether or not there has been a lot of defections from Iraqi troops.

GEN. CASEY: I have only read one report, and it was a newspaper report of a defection from the Iraqi troops that were down there to prepare for this operation. That's the only report I'm aware of. I do have reports of Iraqis not making the movement to Fallujah, but I know of no reports of people, except for that one from the newspaper, of Iraqis leaving after they got there.

MR. WHITMAN: We have time for maybe one or two more. Let's go over to Bryan.

Q General Casey, Bryan Bender with the Boston Globe. Can you tell us, for the operation in Fallujah as well as others that you may be involved with in the coming weeks, do you have enough troops to do this? And can you talk a little bit about what the next couple of months may look like between now and the election in terms of any upsurge in U.S. manpower? And then just one quick follow-up. Is there any other coalition involvement in Fallujah other than the U.S. and the Iraqis?

GEN. CASEY: Last one first. I think you've heard about the Black Watch Battalion of the United Kingdom that is working along the western bank of the Euphrates River as part of this operation to disrupt any movements there between Baghdad and Fallujah.

Do we have enough troops for this operation? We absolutely do. I went out the other day, talked to the commanders, asked them if they had everything they need, and they said that they were very satisfied with the way they were resourced for the operation.

We are just beginning a rotation period here where units will be coming over and replacing other units, and that will go on over the first of the year. We'll pause right around the election date itself, and then we'll finish up in February. And that has been long planned and the units are already preparing to come over here to do that. But there will be -- right now we're not forecasting any major -- or any increase in troops.

Now, that said, I've said all along that as I assess and evaluate the situation, if I come across a situation where I need more troops, I'll ask for them. And I intend to do that.

MR. WHITMAN: We'll make this the last one here.

Q Jim Crawley with Media General. General, you mentioned that some Iraqi forces failed to make movements. Could you elaborate on that and express the significance of that situation and if it had any effect on your plans?

GEN. CASEY: First, it had no effect on the plan. Second, there's a -- the Iraqis have a program that they've had since the Iran-Iraq War where the Iraqi soldiers are on duty for a period of time and then they are on leave for a period of time, and that allows them to take paychecks home and things like that. And so some of these soldiers were on leave and just failed to return, but it did not have a significant impact on our plan. It didn't have an impact on our plan, candidly.

MR. WHITMAN: General, again, thank you for your time. We hope that we'll be able to speak to you again soon and wish you the best. Thank you very much.

GEN. CASEY: Thank you all very much.

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