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Presenter: Major General Abdul Qader Mohammed Jassem Mohan, Chief of Iraqi Military Operations; Lieutenant General John Sattler, USMC, Commander, 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Fallujah

November 10, 2004 11:05 AM EST

Coalition and Iraqi Forces Briefing

Wednesday, November 10, 2004 11:05 a.m. EST

Coalition and Iraqi Forces Briefing

(Note: General Mohan's remarks are provided through interpreter.)

GEN. MOHAN: "Salaam aleikum." The press, ladies and gentlemen, it gives me a great pleasure to stand shoulder to shoulder with General Sattler in this place to give you the military operations.

From the beginning, we, the military officers of the armed forces, we are the last resort for the political leadership. The Iraqi government did their best effort to solve this problem in Fallujah peacefully, but look like it was the last resort.

And until now, this moment, the Iraqi government still offer(s) peace for those that they wanted peace.

INTERPRETER: And so on this podium he would like to say for those, if they want to do that, he has welcomed that.

GEN. MOHAN: I speak for myself, but also I speak for all the Iraqi military. I stand in front of this press, these comrades, and I will remember a sad story in which 49 Iraqi soldiers killed in a cold blood. I also remember those brave soldiers and officers, that they were killed in front of their children.

For this, the Iraqi armed forces, they don't want a revenge, but they want to get rid of insurgents, the evil, the murderer. The insurgents, the thugs, the murderer, they kill us. They want to remove the occupation. I just wanted to tell them: How can we remove the occupation and we have no (sic) enough soldiers to stand shoulder to shoulder to weed out the evil?

The Iraqi forces that we would like to have, we want them to be equipped, to be trained, to take over for

our friends the Multinational Force. We wanted the Iraqi armed forces, the security forces to say what the Iraqi dream is all about. We wish the people of Iraq to live in peace and like any other nation, and not to be killed in the street.

And from this podium, I want to say, we don't want to say what can Iraq give me or give us, but I want to say what can -- as a soldier, what can we give this country, Iraq. What we are doing as soldiers is a small price for our country.

Our armed forces is just at the beginning of their formation. For that, we need the friends, the multinational friends, to help us in this respective. And we work shoulder to shoulder with our friends to minimize the casualty on all sides. For that, we are not accelerating the operation. With all that, we are also giving guidance for the civilians how to be safe, secure during the operation. And our Iraqi armed forces and the friends, we are trying to minimize collateral damage as minimum as we can. We are using weapons according to the enemy situation.

Thank you for this introduction. And now the stage is for General Sattler. Sir.

GEN. SATTLER: I am honored to stand here next to my warrior friend, General Abdul Qader. I spent the -- we spent the day today moving around the battlefield of Fallujah.

And I watched the general talk to his commanders and motivate his commanders and talk to his warriors and motivate his warriors. And the Iraqi soldiers, to the man, who we spoke with stated that they knew that their mission was to return Fallujah to the people of Fallujah. And the coalition force is made up of U.S. soldiers, U.S. airmen, U.S. sailors, and U.S. Marines, along with British warriors. We have taken those capabilities and we have put them in support of the Iraqi security forces.

And I realize you have come here tonight to ask us your questions, therefore I will keep my opening comments brief. And as the general has said, we will continue to pursue the intimidators, the murderers, the thugs, and the terrorists who have stolen Fallujah from the Fallujan people. And in support of our brothers in the Iraqi armed forces, we will not stop till our mission has been completed.

Thank you.

(To General Mohan) Do you want to show the -- introduce the film, please. You can tell them what we have.

GEN. MOHAN: The picture that you witnessed right there on the film it showed Iraqi forces when they entered the symbol called the -- (inaudible) -- Amir Fallujah. These are from the 1st Brigade and they are saluting the Iraqi flag and they are singing the national anthem.

GEN. SATTLER: We're ready for questions.

GEN. MOHAN: (In Arabic.)

INTERPRETER: The general says this morning he was -- he answered a lot of these questions and looks like he's taking a test this afternoon. (Laughter.)

GEN. MOHAN: (In Arabic.)

INTERPRETER: He says there was only one but this is the third one. And I think he's ready for questions.

Q (Off mike) -- some of them say that the operations today are focusing on the center of Fallujah. Can you give us some details? Why are they focusing on the center of Fallujah? And what is the situation now in that place?

INTERPRETER: Should I translate that?

GEN. MOHAN: (In English.) Yes. (Off mike.)

GEN. SATTLER: Was the question why are the forces focusing on central Fallujah?

Q Yeah, what was the situation in central Fallujah -- (off mike) -- focusing on, yes.

GEN. SATTLER: Okay. I will not get into the exact locations in the forward progress of any of the forces for obvious reasons. But I can -- I'll take you to the map, and I'll just cover where we have moved.

The mission is the liberation of the entire city of Fallujah. And part of that mission is to ensure that there are no safe havens, no safe havens throughout the entire city of Fallujah. In performing that mission, that means we must cover the entire city. So there has been no concentration on the center of Fallujah. We've actually worked the entire city to this point, and as you saw in the film, with the Iraqi armed forces leading the way in many of the areas, fighting in all the areas but actually leading the way in many, with both of our missions being the elimination of the terrorists, murderers and intimidators; the reestablishment of the rule of law; and then to build the conditions for reconstruction. The return of essential services to the town can follow immediately after the offensive operations, right behind offensive operations.

The general may want to comment because he was -- his warriors had just returned, just come out of the fight when he met them today.

GEN. MOHAN: Earlier in the other -- previous press conference, I alluded on this issue. But if there is any other question, I am ready to answer it.

GEN. SATTLER: Please? A question for the general. Go ahead.

Q Earlier in the -- in the earlier press conference, apparently you mentioned that you had found homes where -- that had been -- what was the phrase, slaughter houses for hostages?

GEN. SATTLER: Slaughter houses.

Q Slaughter houses for hostages. And I'm wondering if you can elaborate, tell us what you know about that.

I wanted to ask General Sattler about, or both generals actually, about the insurgents. Do you feel that you've captured them all? Do you feel that they've left town? There have been reports that perhaps they surfaced in Ramadi. How many more Fallujahs can you have? Is this meant to be the last attack?

GEN. SATTLER: Okay. Good luck translating all of that. (Laughs.)

INTERPRETER: Yeah. The first question was, in Arabic -- I'm supposed to do that?

GEN. SATTLER: Arabic. You're in Arabic now, that's right.

Q (Off mike.)

INTERPRETER: Okay. In Arabic, okay. (Translates question into Arabic.) I think -- let's have the first question, and then --

GEN. MOHAN: (In Arabic.)

INTERPRETER: General Sattler and himself, they were both in Fallujah area.

GEN. MOHAN: (In Arabic.)

INTERPRETER: He witnessed the CDs that they broadcast. And actually, early on I think he said that there was even the name of who was the victim, right?

GEN. MOHAN: CD?

INTERPRETER: Mm-hmm. Yes.

GEN. MOHAN: And also there was clothing, the black clothing that you've seen in some of the TV that they were broadcasting when they captured some hostages. The Iraqi armed forces unit that they were there, they found in specific homes.

INTERPRETER: What was the second question?

Q The insurgents, have they run away? And what do you hear about them? This was supposed to be their last stand.

GEN. MOHAN: Specifically in Fallujah, the area has been surrounded by different forces, and the possibility of some insurgents, so-called insurgents they might leave, it's possible, but unlikely.

GEN. SATTLER: The strategy to move in was to seal the town off before we actually put the -- crossed into the town, which we did. And as we moved into the town, some of the fighters did in fact resist. And because of the encirclement and the coordination of all forces, both Iraqi forces and coalition forces, because of that coordination, when they attempted to flee from one zone to another they were killed or captured as they moved back and forth. So, as we swept through, we feel very comfortable that none of them moved back through towards the north or escaped out to the flanks. And the fighting was very -- as you all know, in an urban area is very close and very violent, and the warriors across all coalition forces and the Iraqi forces have displayed great courage and have stopped the enemy in small numbers or in larger numbers as they attacked.

Q (In Arabic.)

INTERPRETER: The question is, during this operation, have you had any evidence or are you going to capture -- or what about Musaab al-Zarqawi?

GEN. MOHAN: The Iraqi armed forces, when they came to Fallujah they did not come to only follow and pursue Musaab al-Zarqawi as a person. We arrived here to do a job, to conduct it, and we are not here to get a prize for somebody like Musaab or whatever.

Q General, do you think the back of the resistance is being broken in Fallujah at this point?

GEN. MOHAN: It is kind of hard to answer, but I will give you my best estimate that we probably have in our mind maybe a number, or whatever the number is, and maybe after the hostility will stop, we will figure out what's going on and then we can do a great assessment. And also it is going to depend on overall what is the incidence and the statistic for future terrorist operations. Hopefully, it will be definitely minimized.

GEN. SATTLER: I would just add -- I would like to add one point onto the one answer. That we have been shaping, and in conjunction with the interim Iraqi government and Iraqi armed forces, we have been shaping Fallujah for months. And when we received actionable intelligence, we have struck with precision, very precise munitions. We have struck against the terrorists and struck against their infrastructure. We are comfortable -- you asked if we have broken the back -- we are comfortable that they are not able to communicate, to work out any coordination and are now in small pockets, blind moving throughout the city, and we will continue to hunt them down and destroy them.

Q (Off mike.)

GEN. MOHAN: (In Arabic.)

INTERPRETER: The Kuwaiti TV presented this question. He says the --

Q (Off mike.)

INTERPRETER: Yeah. What was the tactic of the so-called insurgents? And the answer was that they have no tactics. These are thugs and killers.

Q General?

GEN. SATTLER: Yes?

Q Can you give us a map of what's happening now, what's happening now in Fallujah?

GEN. SATTLER: As I -- the question, for those of you who didn't hear it, was can I go ahead and go to the map and go and explain where our forces are now, what is happening as we sit in this room. (Cross talk.)

INTERPRETER: From the way -- the question --

Q (Off mike.)

INTERPRETER: Can you give them --

GEN. SATTLER: I understood. I just wanted to make sure the Arab media understood the question. (Cross talk.) I will then answer the question and then permit the general to answer it.

As I mentioned, the terrorists are -- the thugs who are in the town are blind. They do not know where we are. They do not know where we are coming from now or where we will be within the next hour. And it is a very good question, but I cannot answer it without giving away information they would love to have.

Q General Sattler -- Somebody told us that there is about 70 per cent of Fallujah dominated by the U.S. Marines and the Iraqi forces. Still there is 30 percent -- as they told us -- of insurgents in Fallujah. That means very small areas still have fighting, still there is resistance in these forces.

GEN. MOHAN: And in the morning I give you a very simple answer, and it's for security reasons I cannot tell you where our forces are coming from or what they are going to do. We don't want to give anything to the enemy.

And in the street fighting, in the city fighting, I cannot give you statistics.

GEN. SATTLER: We have time for one more, I believe.

Q Does that mean that a big part of the operation is achieved and there is a small part still --

GEN. SATTLER: We are very -- we are very -- we are very pleased, very pleased with where we are at this time, both of us who stand before you. There's still more work that needs to be done throughout, not just in the center, but in small pockets where we must root, and that's what the Iraqi armed forces were doing today. They were moving into each and every building on their own, clearing those buildings, finding the weapons, disposing of the weapons, and capturing or killing those insurgents who stayed behind.

One last question in the back row, and then that'll be it. Please.

Q Any chance you can talk to us in terms of the numbers of captures of insurgent personnel? Could you please also talk a little bit about the situation regarding some mosques?

And the other thing, I saw you motivating your troops as they went out and fought in the fight, very inspirational to them. Are you able to tell at this stage how many of your troops have paid the sacrifice?

GEN. MOHAN: (In Arabic.)

GEN. SATTLER: When I said one more question, I didn't know it had four parts to it. (Laughter.) But that's good.

INTERPRETER: What was the first one?

Q Are you able to talk about the captured enemy -- of insurgent personnel?

INTERPRETER: Got you. (Translates question into Arabic.)

GEN. SATTLER: I will -- first question. We have captured some, and they are working with us. I do not want to give the numbers because that information is very important to both of us for future operations, very quick operations.

The second part of the question was on casualties. Both the Iraqi warriors and the coalition warriors have taken casualties. But I will want to wait a few more days before once again we let the enemy know how ineffective or possibly effective any of their tactics have been. So I will just say that casualties, as was already stated, are light. We regret any casualty, on either -- on any of our forces, obviously. But they are -- it would be catalogued as light at this time.

And we must honor -- both of us -- we must honor our casualties by moving forward and continuing the mission.

Have you closing comments, sir?

GEN. MOHAN: (In Arabic.)

GEN. SATTLER: (In Arabic.)

GEN. MOHAN: (In Arabic.)

GEN. SATTLER: (In Arabic.)

My warrior brother.

GEN. MOHAN: (In Arabic.)

GEN. SATTLER: Please.

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