



**U.S. Department of Defense**  
Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs)  
**News Transcript**

**On the Web:**

<http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=2203>

Media contact: +1 (703) 697-5131/697-5132

**Public contact:**

<http://www.defenselink.mil/faq/comment.html>  
or +1 (703) 428-0711 +1

---

**Presenter: Army Lt. Gen. Ricardo S. Sanchez**

**February 26, 2004**

---

**Combined Joint Task Force 7 Briefing from Baghdad**

Combined Joint Task Force 7 Briefing from Baghdad

Sanchez: It's great to be back in front of you. I look forward to the questions. Let me start out by giving you a brief opening statement.

First of all, I would like to express my sincere condolences to the families of the Iraqi security forces, the innocent Iraqi civilians and coalition service members who have lost their lives while helping to establish freedom here in Iraq.

Today, former regime loyalists and terrorists continue to attack the citizens of Iraq, the Iraqi security forces and our coalition forces. Those who attempt to prevent a free and democratic state will definitely fail. We remain undaunted. Despite the attacks, the list of Iraqis volunteering to join security forces continues to grow and the training facilities for these forces are full and continue to expand. Attacks designed to intimidate Iraqis from serving in the Iraqi security forces, instead, have stirred patriotism among young Iraqis and they continue to show up at a rate of four to one for every billet that we have available. Police and army training classes are filled to capacity, both in Jordan and here in the country. The Iraqi Civil Defense Corps, which has 23 battalions this week, will have 13 more battalions by April, and we expect no problems in being able to man and to train those units. The result is that offensive operations now increasingly include joint and independent Iraqi security force operations across the country.

Earlier this month, one particular event provided a very clear example of the progress that is being made in Iraqi security force capabilities. On Sunday the 15th of February members of the national Iraqi police service's Emergency Response Unit tracked down and arrested number 41 of the deck of 55's most wanted, Mohammed Zimam al-Razaq -- a former Ba'ath party regional chairman. The arrest followed an investigation and a series of coordinated raids independently conducted by the Iraqi police service. This achievement is a milestone in the continuing development of Iraq's security forces.

Meanwhile, the shape and structure of coalition forces continues to change. We're in the midst of transitioning our forces, an immensely complex task that is being undertaken with few problems up to this point.

In the south, the transition to Multinational Division Southeast and Multinational Division South is complete and the forces are continuing to provide a safe and secure environment throughout their zones of operation.

In the north, the 101st Airborne Division has returned to the States and it was replaced by Task Force Olympia, which features our Stryker armored vehicle, which is ideally suited for the missions required of them in this area. In addition, the coalition is now more diverse with the addition of Japanese units in Multinational Division Southeast. In their first deployment into a combat environment since World War II, the Japanese soldiers reported to the Tamawah (sp) area to provide much-needed medical assistance, water supplies and reconstruction of public facilities.

Now in the coming months, the 82nd Airborne, the 4th Infantry and the 1st Armored Division will rotate out of the country and redeploy back to their home stations, and the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (minus), the 1st Infantry Division, and the 1st Cavalry Division will deploy into the country and take their places, in addition to numerous other rotations of non-U.S. coalition elements.

During this ongoing process that will run through the May time frame, the size of the coalition forces will decrease from approximately 130,000 troops to about 110,000 to 115,000.

As Iraqi security forces become more numerous and capable, more of the security responsibilities will be shouldered by them. However, the coalition will remain shoulder-to-shoulder with the Iraqi security forces in a partnership to maintain a safe and secure environment. Any organization that interprets the increasing Iraqi role in the security mission as a sign that coalition forces are either losing their resolve or moving to remote bases to avoid casualties will be making a deadly error. We will remain as staunch partners with the Iraqi security forces until our mission of bringing security and stability to this country is accomplished.

In the area of civil military operations, the coalition continues to invest heavily, on behalf of the Iraqi people, in projects aimed at restoring critical infrastructure and public services throughout the country. To date, we have used the Commanders' Emergency Response Program funds to support more than \$182 million on over 17,500 projects throughout the country. This has included over \$8 million on health projects, \$18 million on 2,200 reconstruction projects, and about \$35 million on education initiatives.

Now let me conclude on that note and tell you that the coalition's military focus, along with our Iraqi security partners, remains committed to establishing and maintaining a safe and secure environment for the people of Iraq. Though we can expect some setbacks as we move forward, the tide of change is now inevitable as Iraq moves forward to a sovereign and united nation, which protects and defends the rights of its citizens to live in freedom and prosperity.

I'll now go ahead and take your questions. Yes, sir?

Q: General, Gregor Mayer from the German Press Agency, DPA. General, the November 15 agreement foresees the closure of a status of forces agreement by the end of March. Now we have a growing desire on the Iraqi side of having this postponed after the change of authority at the end of June. Are you aware of this, and is this posing problems to the coalition forces if there, let's say, is a gap between handing over authority and not being any more occupation force, and just later getting a status of forces agreement?

Sanchez: No, absolutely not. The November 15 agreement talked about achieving some sort of a security arrangement with the Iraqi people, not necessarily and specifically a SOFA, as you described. And at this point in time, we do not see any sort of an issue with us continuing to operate here in the country. It is still to be determined in the negotiations that are ongoing what those security arrangements will be, and that is in the process of being discussed in the discussions that are taking place at this time. It is not a gap in our ability to hand over authority by the 30th of June.

Yes, sir?

Q [Through interpreter.]: General, you have just talked about up to the subject of changing the or the moving

out of the coalition forces and giving authority to the Iraqi police and to the Iraqi security forces. So do I understand that giving -- of course you are handing out sovereignty to the Iraqis after the 30th of June, that you are not going to withdraw from the centers of the cities? Are the coalition forces going to be situated in the middle of the country, in the middle of the cities, or are they going to go to the boundaries? So does this form any threat, specifically if U.S. forces are going to be inside the country after giving the sovereignty and handing over the sovereignty to the Iraqis? Does this form a threat to the Iraqis? Can you just give us your view?

Sanchez: The concept of local control that we have described in the past calls for us to move from inside of the cities to forward operating bases or camps that are on the boundaries of the cities or outside of the major population areas. The basic criteria that allows us to do this is the ability to hand over law and order missions -- or responsibilities, rather -- to the Iraqi security forces that are operating in that urban area. The condition is that they are capable and credible enough to be able to assume those responsibilities. And therefore, as you look across the country, we will evolve into local control at varying speeds in the different parts of the country.

There are some parts of the country today that are already under the local control of Iraqi security forces, but as a specific example let me talk about Baghdad. Baghdad will, in fact, have the 1st Armored Division and the 1st Cavalry Division that will move to their operating bases on the outskirts of the city. And we will, in fact, turn over the responsibility to the security forces inside of the city, but that does not mean that we are not conducting operations in the city. We will have joint coordination centers where we will have the coalition forces, the Iraqi security forces all co-located to synchronize and coordinate and accomplish the tasks that are necessary to continue to provide security and stability to the city. We will still conduct operations in the city in coordination with the Iraqi security forces, and we will have quick reaction forces that are available to reinforce the Iraqi police, the Civil Defense Corps or the army as required and to operate with them jointly in the event that the mission requires significantly more capability than what they have available to them at that time.

Q: (In Arabic.)

Sanchez: Go ahead and follow up. Go ahead.

Q [Through interpreter.]: After you just hand over the stability to the Iraqis on 30th June, so you will go out of the country as attacks come to Baghdad. So as forces, you will be out of the country at the middle of Baghdad instability. Can you just give us a date that the coalition forces will be transmitted or they are going to go outside Baghdad after exactly the 30th of June?

Sanchez: The exact date -- our goal, what we are shooting for is to have our forces in these base camps that are on the outskirts of Baghdad by the time that the 1st Cavalry Division comes into the country, which is in the middle to the latter part of April. And we will have established our coordination and our linkages to the Iraqi security forces. But let me reemphasize that this does not mean that we are not in the cities. We are still going to be conducting patrols. We're still going to be working with the police and the Civil Defense Corps in the cities to provide the security and law and order.

Okay? Yes, sir?

Q [Through interpreter.]: Ahmed Zareybi (ph) from -- (Inaudible.). As the main commander for the joint forces, are you going to be participating in the elections now? And if you say no, why?

Sanchez: Okay. I'm not sure I really understood your question. Your question, I believe, was, as the commander of coalition forces, will we be participating in the elections?

Q: (In Arabic.)

Sanchez: Can you clarify that a little bit, please?

Q [Through interpreter.]: Regarding because you are the commanding forces of -- are you going to be with the elections of --

Second Interpreter: Okay, sir. His question is that, as being the commander in chief of the military, so are you with the idea of having election at the time being, with the idea to have the election at the time being in Iraq? Is it possible or suitable enough to have the election right now despite the security situation in Iraq?

Sanchez: Okay. I think your question is whether I believe, as the coalition force commander, if it's possible to hold elections. I think the answer I have to give you is that I have to defer to the United Nations' position and Ambassador Bremer's stated positions on the conduct of elections.

As far as the security conditions across the country, I'd have to tell you that the security conditions today are considerably better than what they were 60 days ago. In an -- on an average day today, we are encountering about 18 to 20 engagements across the entire country. And we have a significantly improved security situation in the country, and the security situation that we're currently experiencing is manageable for whatever governance processes need to take place.

Yes, sir?

Q [Through interpreter.]: Baram Hamid Arin (sp), from the Bashakayeh (sp) newspaper. How do you see the capability of the Iraqi forces after the coalition forces get pulled out of Iraq? Would [they] be able to secure the country by themselves?

Sanchez: How do I see the capability of the Iraqi security forces and will they have the capability to secure the country by themselves is the question? And correct me if that's not correct, if that's not right.

First of all, the capability of the Iraqi security forces today is growing. And it is a capability that we continue to build across the entire country for both -- for all of the police, the Civil Defense Corps forces and for the new Iraqi army.

Today we have only three battalions of the new Iraqi army trained and fielded. I already gave you the numbers for the ICDC and the police. We continue to train the professional police force, and that will take us some time into 2005.

The army will in fact be fielded. We believe that the program we have in place is on track and that we can field the 27 battalions and three light motorized divisions by the October time frame. And then there will be a requirement for us to continue to train and to build the capability of those divisions to provide external security for the country.

The ICDC -- the 45 battalions that we will have on line will in fact be there by the end of April and May time frame, and they will be capable and continue to grow over time.

In terms of their capability to secure the country by themselves when the coalition forces pull out, that is exactly the objective that we have. The timelines to do that are yet undetermined, and the Iraqis will have to make some decisions, once they establish their own sovereign entities, as to the eventual end state of the Civil Defense Corps, the end state and size and type of army they will have, and the types of security arrangements that they might have to or want to engage with the international community.

Yes, sir? In the back.

Q: Alistair Wanklin (sp) -- Fox News. Two questions.

The Senate Intelligence Committee in the past couple of days discussed the case of the missing serviceman Michael Scott Speicher. Can you tell us, please, whether investigations on your side continue into his disappearance and whether there's anything to tell us on --

The second question is, can you tell us whether anything further came out of the death of Zarqawi's lieutenant in Habbaniya a couple days ago?

Sanchez: You said Michael Speicher, correct?

Q: Yeah, Michael Speicher.

Sanchez: Yes. The Iraqi Survey Group continues to work on Michael Speicher's case. On every opportunity or every clue they get, they follow up on that and we continue to search for him. In terms of the follow-on to the Zarqawi lieutenant, at this point what you've seen in the press and what we have released is about what we can tell you.

Yes, sir?

Q: Patrick McDonald from the Los Angeles Times. General, could you elaborate a little bit on what the role of the U.S. military is going to be post-sovereignty handover. I mean, when you're kind of moving out of the cities, are you essentially going to be providing backup? I mean, are you going to be doing the primary intelligence gathering? Who's going to be coming up with ideas for missions? Is it going to be a secondary role or a primary role?

Sanchez: The answer is yes. (Laughter.) And let me elaborate a little bit. Primary and secondary -- where it is that we have been able to hand off local control, we will be in a secondary role. And we will be there to provide quick reaction forces and still continue to operate with those Iraqi security forces every single day. Where we have not been able to build the capacities of the Iraqi secure forces to the level where they can accomplish the task on their own, then we'll be there with them as partners conducting those operations.

We suspect that on the 1st of July the conditions in the country will still be unstable to an extent. We expect that we will still have to be conducting offensive operations to defeat terrorists and possibly some anti-coalition forces that will still be adamant about continuing their quest. And we will be able to conduct unilateral operations given the intelligence and conduct those precise intel-driven offensive ops to destroy them.

In the back.

Q: (Name inaudible.), CNN. We've got -- we've heard reports that there was an explosion in a market in the center of the city Baqubah. Do you have any information about this? If so, what happened?

Sanchez: No, ma'am, I did not have that when I walked in here. We can check in the process and try to get you something before the end of the conference.

Q: Yes, please. Thank you.

Sanchez: Yes, sir, in the back?

Q: Two small questions, General. Luke Pfeiffer, German television. Are coalition forces involved in any means in the security operation ahead of the Ashura events at the 10th of Muharram, which is next week in Karbala? And linked to this question, do you have any control about the influx of foreign pilgrims at this stage? We meet a lot of Iranian pilgrims in the city here. Do you have any figures? Is this a controlled influx, or do you

have any ways of controlling this?

Sanchez: The answer to the first question, whether coalition forces are involved in the security for Ashura, definitely. We have been working with the governors and the security forces in Najaf, in Karbala, here in Baghdad and some of the other major cities to be able to assist in providing that security. We have had meetings with the leadership, and in Karbala there's a robust plan that is synchronized and coordinated to be able to provide security. It is a concern for us, especially given the Zarqawi letter that talks about creating instability and hopefully the conditions for civil war between the Sunni and the Shi'a. We have paid special attention to this, but we think we've been working closely enough with Iraqi security forces that we can provide reasonable security. That doesn't mean that we're going to prevent every incident from occurring.

In terms of the influx of Iranians, that does continue. There is no agreement at this point between Iran and Iraq as to the numbers that can flow into the country, and that is a challenge that we're facing today.

All right?

Q: A little follow-up. So there's no control at the borders?

Sanchez: Well, the --

Q: You have no figures, actually, of how many people are entering?

Sanchez: No. I could not stand up here and tell you that we have positive figures on the numbers of Iranians that have come in from the Iranian border. When you say there is no control, there is no total control. There are some ports of entry on the Iranian border that are being manned and run by the border police -- the Iraqi border police and the border enforcement, but that does not imply that there is total control of the borders. And therefore, there are some areas where they can come across undetected and unaccounted for.

Yes, sir?

Q [Through interpreter.]: From LBC. Do you have any intention as to have NATO participate with the coalition forces? If the answer is yes, how would be the process? And are they going to be the leaders, and are you going to put the coalition forces under the leader of NATO?

So can you also tell us that, regarding the dissemination of the coalition forces inside the country, if there is any programs or schedules for those people, because in fact they are making the chaos inside the country and too much traffic jams that annoy the Iraqi people while they are in the streets with their patrols and tanks everywhere. So can you just give or try to schedule those people or try to organize them not to annoy the Iraqi people in the streets with their tanks over there?

Sanchez: The price of freedom. (Laughs.)

First of all, on NATO, at this point in time there are no plans for NATO to come into the country to take over the mission here in the country. Discussions and long-term plans are -- you know, clearly those are options for the future. The decisions have to be made at the international level, at the national command authority level in coordination with NATO and Iraq. And at this point in time, there is no positive plan that is in place.

In terms of the traffic jams and the chaos, I think we're all part of the chaos out there, not just the military. And we will continue to conduct our operations as required. We are, in fact, minimizing the track vehicle movement. Part of the process of moving to local control and moving to the outskirts is an attempt to minimize all of our traffic inside of the cities. That's a side benefit to that. But clearly, as I stated before, when required in order to bring security and stability to the country, we will conduct our operations to kill or capture anti-coalition forces. But we

are working very hard to work together with the Iraqi people to minimize some of the annoyances that are out there.

Yes, ma'am?

Q: (Name and affiliation inaudible.) -- Spain. General, every time that there is a bomb attack recently -- it happened in Iskandariyah, it happened in Hillah, it happened also in the recruiting center here in Baghdad -- large amounts of the population seem to be convinced that coalition forces, American forces, to be precise, are responsible for that. No matter how preposterous that may be, why do you think this happens that the people believe that? And is that something that worries you?

Sanchez: I don't know. I don't know why the people think that. What I do know is that it's not true, that it's rumors. And I do know that we have to counter that. And I do know that we do, in fact, go out and talk to people and show them that it is not the American forces or the coalition forces that are doing that; and that it is, in fact, a terrorist element that is out there conducting those attacks against their own people; that Zarqawi is operating, that Ansar al-Islam and elements of al Qaeda are operating to kill Iraqis, and other Iraqis are conducting operations to kill Iraqis; and that it's not the coalition that is here to create instability and to get our soldiers killed.

So you know, we all have to work together to ensure that the people understand that we're about partnership, we're about freedom and democracy and peace and stability and security for everybody here in this country.

In the back, on the right. You, sir. Yes, sir?

Q [Through interpreter.]: Abrahim Saradjak (sp), (Name inaudible.) Daily. Mr. General, there was a hundred former Ba'ath -- (Inaudible.) -- and intelligence for the army and media in Syria. Is the United States afraid that might form some kind of terrorist organization, which is against the area, create some kind of fear against the area?

Sanchez: Explain that. Restate the question again, please.

Interpreter: Okay. What he's saying -- that there is ex- elements for the ex-regime, ex-intelligence officers. They live in Syria. They have presence in Syria. Some of them are businessmen. Are you guys afraid that these people might get together and form kind of terrorist organization against the U.S. and maybe create some kind of operation against Iraq, terrorists organizing in Iraq?

Sanchez: Clearly, the existence of former Ba'ath Party intelligence and other operatives in countries either surrounding the region or in other international locations are a concern in terms of their willingness and their ability to support instability here in the country.

Syria in particular has shown that they are not totally committed to stopping the instability that is being exported out of Syria into Iraq. They've got to do a much better job of shutting down their borders to keep foreigners from coming in, to keep some of the terrorists from flowing in, and preventing them from staging inside of their territory.

It is a concern to us that there may be former regime elements that are outside of the country continuing to foment instability and bringing it into the country against the Iraqi people and against the coalition.

All the way to the right.

Q: Richard Beaston (sp) from the Times. General, I was wondering if you could comment on a report in the American press this morning that 112 sexual assaults occurred against American servicewomen in the last 18 months in Central Command alone. I was wondering how many servicewomen have been attacked in Iraq and

whether you consider that -- really consider it a serious problem.

Sanchez: Well, any violation of dignity and respect and the rights of an individual are a problem in any organization. And you know, this is something that we do not condone. This is something that we very aggressively tackle when the allegations surface, whether it's sexual harassment or actual crimes. And I could not tell you right off the top of my head how many have occurred here in the last year. I think we've got those numbers and we can provide those numbers to you in terms of actual sex crimes, sexual harassment and those details. We can provide that to you.

Sir?

Q [Through interpreter.]: (Name and affiliation inaudible.) What you said about the Iranian issues. As I heard that you said there is no capability of control of the -- having the Iranian pilgrims to come into the country, and you said that there is no specific agreement between Iraq and Iran indicating that. So in fact, there is an agreement between Iraq and Iran indicating the -- allowing the pilgrims, or 5,000 Iranians into the country. So how can you -- just give us your opinion about that. Five thousand Iranians.

Sanchez: How can I give you my opinion about what?

Interpreter: About the agreement. They say --

Sanchez: About the agreement, lack of agreement, the 5,000, or what?

(Pause.)

Q [Through interpreter.]: Regarding the agreement, you just told us that there is no agreement between the Iraqis and Iranians indicating or implementing the fact that there is a permission of 5,000; every month, 5,000 Iranian pilgrims can enter the country. So is there such agreement or there isn't?

Sanchez: No, okay, I understand the question. To my understanding, there is no agreement.

Yes, sir?

Q: Thank you, sir. [Continues through interpreter.] By the name of God, Allah hu Akbar. From Al-Sawa (ph) newspaper. Salaam aleikum. As being the commander in chief of the military divisions in Iraq, there is a very saddening campaign against antiterrorism in Iraq. Do you have an idea of these figure of the member of the terrorist insurgents, or at least you give us your idea, roughly, about the number, or you don't know anything about that number of the terrorists that are present in Iraq?

Sanchez: Well, I wouldn't say that I don't know anything about the number. In terms of the actual number of terrorists, it's pretty difficult to pinpoint them because they're moving back and forth through both borders -- in the Syrian and in the Iranian border. We also have some homegrown terrorists in Ansar al-Islam, Ansar al-Sunna, and the ability to be able to establish their support base and their actual size is pretty difficult. So I couldn't give you a number right off the top of my head that would be based on clear logic and, besides, it probably wouldn't be smart for me to give you a number at this point.

Yes, sir?

Q: (Inaudible.) -- a Japanese newspaper. There is still some of the coalition forces while they are making their raids they are practicing some improper ways for not taking into consideration the Iraqis' traditions. So they are just -- the ways they are taking what they are -- the ways they are making their raids, they never have any respect for the Iraqi families. So have you just got any procedures or have you taken any procedures regarding

respecting the families when they're making -- or respecting the tradition of the Iraqi families making their raids?

Sanchez: Yes, I think we all understand that this has been a continuing battle for the last 10 months and we have made significant improvements. We have significant command emphasis on the conduct of our offensive operations and our raids to ensure that we are protecting the dignity and the respect of the coalition -- or correction, of the Iraqis that the coalition is engaging with when we conduct our offensive operations. We are reemphasizing that during this period where we're transitioning this entire force, and we'll continue to do that. And we do, in fact, have Iraqis that are helping us to ensure that we clearly understand what our training programs ought to be to be able to let all the soldiers know what the sensitivities are. And there are a lot of lessons that we learned last summer that we will have to ensure are passed on to the forces that are coming into the country that have not had the experience here in Iraq. So we'll continue to work that.

Yes, sir?

Q: (Name inaudible.) -- for the Arabiyan channel. Can you please tell us about yesterday's incident; if you released anything about the fall off a U.S. plane, whether it's because a technical failure or because a fire -- an enemy fire? And if it is by technical failure, why every time we hear about such incidents?

Sanchez: I'm not sure I understood the last part of your question. What -- why do you hear about what incidents?

Q: Why every day we hear such -- we hear about such incidents, that there is a technical failure and --

Sanchez: Yeah. Okay. No, that's not necessarily true. We have been very upfront in stating when our helicopters have been shot down by enemy fire. We have very clearly stated that when it has occurred. So that is not exactly right.

Yesterday what happened was, there was no enemy fire yesterday, and that was a wire strike, as we understand it right now. The helicopter hit some wires and wound up crashing and killing the two pilots.

But you know, we have absolutely no problem with telling you when it is that we have lost a helicopter due to enemy fire, and we will continue to do that.

Yes, ma'am?

Q: Christine Spolar, Chicago Tribune. Can you talk about these 17 military personnel who have been, I guess, in detention of some kind or suspended for a while, under investigation for mistreatment of prisoners in Abu Ghraib?

And also, second, a not related question: When you talk about the drawdown of troops here and how they were changing, are some of those troops going toward the spring offensive in Afghanistan? And can you indicate troop strength with that? Thank you.

Sanchez: First of all, on the 17 personnel that have been suspended, they are suspended from their duties while we continue to conduct the investigation. The investigation is not complete at this point in time, and therefore I can't give you any more information than that. But at the right time, once those investigations are complete and we've moved forward with the judicial process or we've cleared those individuals, we will make that public.

Clearly, it is very important for us to protect the individual, the unit and the institutions. That's why it's important for us to preserve the integrity of that investigation process and not discuss it during this -- at this point in the investigation.

In terms of the drawdown of forces here in the country, these forces are all returning to their home bases.

In the back, on the left.

Q [Through interpreter.]: Yasser (sp) from the Free Iraq -- (Inaudible.). General, after they convert the sovereignty to the Iraqis, who's going to determine the timetable for the coalition to stay in Iraq? The new elected government or the present Governing Council?

Sanchez: Okay. The question is, who will determine the timetable for the length of stay of the coalition here in the country after sovereignty? Clearly, after sovereignty the responsibility for making decisions here in the country will transition to some interim government moving towards a duly elected sovereign government in the 2005 time frame. Those are the bodies that will have the responsibility for determining how long the partnership with the coalition forces will have to be sustained over time. And we will be here as long as it takes for us to bring that security, and beyond the 30th of June, it will be with the consent of the Iraqi people. And we believe that there is consensus that at this point in time the presence of the coalition forces is necessary to continue to ensure the stability and security of the country both internally and externally.

Yes, sir? In the back. You, sir.

Q: (Name inaudible.) -- NHK. General, when you mentioned that for the transfer of authority for the security, you judged Iraqi forces to be capable and credible, could you elaborate on that point? What does it mean that they are capable and credible? Is it going to be a technical judgment or is it going to be a political judgment?

Sanchez: A what?

Q: A technical judgment or a political judgment.

Sanchez: Okay.

Q: And related to that, from a purely military point of view do you think that June 30 is a bit hasty as a schedule?

Sanchez: First of all, on the credible and capable, I think it's fairly straightforward. The "capable" aspect of the coalition -- correction -- of the Iraqi security forces is fairly straightforward: are they able to conduct the missions independently that they have been assigned? The police, as an example: can they ensure law and order in a city in coordination with the other Iraqi security forces that may be operating in that city, independently, or in coordination with the coalition for missions that are above and beyond what they were designed for? That's a very straightforward training, manning and equipping determination that can be made.

In terms of the "credible" aspect, what we're working towards is to make sure that we have Iraqi security forces that are responsive to the civilian control, that are for the people, to protect the society, and that we have those security forces that are respected by the population as ensuring the rights and freedoms of the population. The "credible" aspect, we will continue to work very hard with all the elements of the society and internally with those security forces to build the right instincts. In terms of opinions on June the 30th -- is it hasty, not hasty? I'll tell you that it is. June 30th is the date. And that's what we're moving to and that's what we're supporting as a coalition force.

Yes, ma'am?

Q: Lourdes Navarro, AP. There's been a news blackout about Saddam Hussein and where he is and is he well, how's his health, and anything related to him. Have you gotten any information from him regarding weapons

of mass destruction, regarding any of the points that you are looking into? And it would be greatly appreciated if we can have some information about where he is and what he's doing.

Sanchez: (Laughs.) Yes, ma'am, it sure would be nice, wouldn't it? (Laughs.) One of these days we'll probably be able to disclose a lot of that information at the right time at the right place and under the right conditions. I think I can provide you some of that. Okay? Health is good. No issues. And I think that's about it. (Laughter.) As to where he is, he's under our custody.

Q: May I just follow up? (Laughs.)

Sanchez: Sure. (Laughs.)

Q: Because -- well, "health is good" is great. But apart from that, when do you expect to hand him over for trial? That surely isn't something that will compromise your security.

Sanchez: Right. That's still undetermined at this point. There's still a lot of work that has to go on to determine what the modalities will be for trials and working with the Iraqi people. And in the meantime, he will continue to be in the custody of the U.S. as a prisoner of war, and those determinations will be made in the future.

Q: Just one more thing. Is he -- (Laughs.) -- sorry about this, but, you know -- he is the number one -- he was the former leader of this country, which you have in control, and we have so little information about what he's saying. Has he given you anything at all about weapons of mass destruction? He should know presumably. Have you gotten anything? Is he being cooperative at least?

Sanchez: He's in good health. (Laughs.)

Yes, ma'am?

Q: Hi, Rachel with NBC. A question about female Iraqi detainees. I understand there are at least a hundred, if not more. My question is what is their status right now? How long will they be in detention? What's the process of them getting out?

Sanchez: Mm-hmm. Grossly exaggerated number. As of yesterday we have less than 20 that are in custody. I can give you -- I forgot the numbers. I looked at them right before I walked up here in my office. I can give you those numbers.

There are a couple of them that are high-value detainees that will remain in our custody over time until their fate is determined as the result of the process we just discussed briefly. We have some criminals. I think the number is about five criminal detainees that are females that are in the custody of the Iraqi police. And then there's a number, I think it's about 10, that are security detainees that are under the custody of coalition forces.

Yes, ma'am?

Q: I just want to follow up. What will happen with these detainees, not just the women but the men as well, after June 30th, when authority gets transferred?

Sanchez: That is an issue that we're in the process of working our way through. Some of these -- clearly, there's different categories of them. The latest number that we've got is over 13,000 total when you look at all of the detainees that are across the country. Some of them are criminals that are under the custody of the Iraqi police. We have the 3,800 MEK that continue to be under our custody out at Ashraf. You have the high-value detainees, and then you have, of course, the security internees. Some of those in that security category are -- some of them will become criminal detainees, some of them will be released and then some of them will continue

to be of value, that will be detained over time. We are working through that process right now, and the end state on 1 July is to be determined as we move forward in our discussions with the Iraqis.

Q: All right, one last -- will any of them be transferred to Guantanamo, or is that --

Sanchez: I'm sorry?

Q: Will any of them be eventually transferred to Guantanamo?

Sanchez: That's undetermined at this point.

All the way in the back?

Q: (Name inaudible.) -- German television. I just have two questions. One is, just to clarify, you said the troops that are being replaced are going home, to their home bases. That means, for example, for the 1st Armored Division, they will be returning to Germany? And the second question is, there has been reports in German TV that U.S. soldiers deliberately shot at already-wounded Iraqi soldiers during the fighting action, so that would probably violate the Geneva Convention. Do you know anything about it and can you comment on that?

Sanchez: No, I -- on the second question, I have no idea what you're talking about. If you had some specifics, we might be able to take a look at it for you and give you some kind of follow-on information, but that's just too broad for me to comment knowledgeably.

On the first part, the 1st Armored Division will go back to Wiesbaden, okay; go back to my home. (Laughs.)

Q: Mine too.

Sanchez: Yours, too? Good. We need to talk. (Laughs.)

In the back?

Q [Through interpreter.]: Hassan Mounouf (ph), the news agency -- (Inaudible.). The visit of Mr. Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense, to Iraq, has he just formulated the main formation of the Ministry of Defense? Has he -- was his presence for the purpose of setting up the new Ministry of Defense, Iraqi, or was there any other purposes behind his visit?

Sanchez: Well, I don't have the specific task and purpose of the secretary's visit, but it was to meet with key leaders of the coalition, both military and the Coalition Provisional Authority. During his time here he visited a police academy and he also visited some of the troops here in Baghdad during the time that he was here. It was not a specific task of coming into the country to establish the Ministry of Defense. That is still being worked by the CPA and Ambassador Bremer.

Yes, sir?

Q: General, I wonder if you could tell us -- something we've heard a good deal about, but I'd like to hear your own estimate of it -- how the shape of the war is changing and how much of a challenge, increased or decreased, you find that? And related to that, what do you say to the proposition that the failure, if that's what it proves to be, of the Iraqi political entities to agree on the future political course beyond June the 30th could leave the United States Armed Forces here in a difficult position of, in effect, defending a government that might be at war with itself?

Sanchez: The first question is a lot easier than the second one. (Laughs.)

The shape of the war today. What we are seeing with the enemy is a decrease as a result of our focused operations post-Saddam, where we were able to precisely target significant amounts of leadership and strength of the former regime element opposition, to the point where I think today we see them operating at the cell level and maybe some local synchronization and coordination that may be going on, and working to try to reestablish some sort of cohesiveness and direction above that. But we continue to precisely target them, and I think we have disrupted them significantly in the course of the last 60 days or so.

But what has happened, and it's very clear, is that the terrorist elements of Zarqawi, Ansar al-Islam and the linkages to al Qaeda have begun to take preeminence in the actions that are being conducted against the coalition and all of its different aspects. The terrorist effort continues, even more focused today at trying to split the coalition. That is what is manifesting itself -- that element of the strategy is what is manifesting itself when we see the very focused attacks against the police, against the new Iraqi army, against the Civil Defense Corps and against the governing -- political figures that are working with the coalition to reestablish the country. This will continue.

I think the Zarqawi letter is fairly robust in laying out the strategy that they're following. And they believe that they are at a critical stage. And the way that they can disrupt the move towards democracy and freedom and economic prosperity for this country is by creating ethnic strife and hopefully taking the country into civil war.

We are very focused on that. We are engaging with all elements of the society and ensuring that they clearly understand that this country has to stay united as a single Iraq, federalism is probably their best option, and that democracy is a worthwhile goal.

And I'm glad to say that just about all -- no -- well, all of the elements that I have had conversations with are committed to one Iraq. And that's very good news, because even though there is a lot of challenges still ahead in the political arena, I think, in the end, we will succeed in having a clear way ahead for the future of the country.

Is it possible that the country could move to civil war and the coalition forces find themselves trying to separate ethnicities? It's possible, but I don't think at this point it's likely.

Yes, ma'am?

Q: Hi. (Inaudible name) with U.S. News and World Report. With regard to the terrorist elements in the country currently, is there a plan for what's to be done with the PKK up north?

Sanchez: The answer is yes. (Chuckles.) There is a plan, and we continue to work with all interested parties on the way ahead with the PKK. That's about the extent of the comment I could make on the PKK at this point.

Q: Can you give me any idea of timeline for the plan?

Sanchez: There is a plan. (Chuckles.)

Yes, sir? On the right.

Q [Through interpreter.]: (Inaudible.) -- from the -- (Inaudible.) -- Kurdish. (Inaudible.) Can you explain to me why the savages at -- was savage attacks against the Iraqis before and during the visit of the U.N. team. And a lot of parts of the city, they say that the coalition forces have a hand in that, have in the attack, especially the one against the police station. Especially there's some people who the Americans -- they said -- they expressed themselves that they work for the press.

Sanchez: I don't know how clear I can be, that the U.S. and the coalition has no hand whatsoever in conducting attacks against Iraqis and against the police and other Iraqi security forces. It just doesn't happen.

Yes, sir?

Q [Through interpreter.]: (Name inaudible.) -- Al-Iraqiyah Television. Do you have the intention to release another member of ex-regime elements just like -- (Name inaudible.) -- who has been in your custody under the coalition forces? Do you have any intention to release some other elements of the ex-regime people? Specifically, those who are under the list, the list of the 55 wanted -- top wanted people.

Sanchez: To the second part of the question on the 55, absolutely not. I think I described just a while ago what the process will be for them to get properly tried and the hand-offs that will have to occur between the coalition and the proper authorities that are determined in coordination with the Iraqi people and the coalition.

In terms of general release of detainees, we are in the process, as I highlighted earlier, of going through a daily review of the detainees that are in our custody -- security detainees -- to determine whether we need to keep them in custody, or whether we need to go ahead and release them. And we are -- we have released at this point almost 300 detainees to guarantors. We have another about 250 that have been linked up with guarantors to be released in the coming weeks. And we continue to very aggressively move to draw down those numbers.

Yes, sir?

Q: General Sanchez, in case the sovereignty has been handed over to the Iraqis according to the exact date and according to the agreement with the Iraqi government, and in case that the Iraqis were not capable to take over this responsibility, will there be any agreements taking place between the coalition and the Iraqis for a period of 10 years that will indicate the presence of the -- that will approve the presence of the coalition forces for another 10 years until everything will be settled and the Iraqis will be capable enough to take the responsibility or to be handed over the sovereignty? So in case the sovereignty hasn't been handed over in the exact time, what will be the other option? Is it true that there is another option for that?

Sanchez: The position of the United States and the coalition at this point is that sovereignty will be handed over on the 30th of June. I don't know of any 10-year deal that is out there.

Yes, sir?

Q: Ned Parker from AFP. I was wondering, it seems the last month there have been more casualties -- Iraqi casualties than any other month since the U.S. forces, coalition forces arrived here. Does that mean that -- if the terrorist threat is preeminent, does that mean that they're deadlier than what came under Saddam? How do you explain the fact, if engagements are less and the security situation is better, that more people are dying?

The second question is just, where do you think Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri is now? Do you think he's in country, or is it possible he left?

Sanchez: On al-Douri, we continue under the assumption that he is in the country someplace.

Q: (Off mike.)

Sanchez: About as close as I was on the 12th of December in catching Saddam. We chase him every day. Okay? And we will get him.

Q: I think before, in December, you thought he was a major -- in November he was described as a major

player in the resistance and making an alliance between, I guess, former Ba'athists and potentially foreign fighters. Do you still feel that he's playing a role like that, or even does he have ties with Zarqawi in any way?

Sanchez: I don't have anything to indicate that there's a linkage to Zarqawi at this point. I believe that with the very focused offensive operations that we have conducted, as I stated earlier, we've disrupted the leadership structures of the former-regime elements. I believe that al-Douri is definitely on the run. He knows that since we have shown very clearly our ability to track him down and kill him or capture him, that he's next, and we're relentless, and that we're going to get him -- unless he dies first.

On the first question, how do we explain more people dying, I think that's fairly straightforward. As I described earlier, it's the terrorist element that is focusing the Iraqi people. It's focusing people that are defenseless. The attack on Assassin's Gate killed Iraqis that were going about their daily lives, moving around the city. The attack at the new Iraqi army recruiting station killed Iraqis that were lining up to serve their country. And the killing of ICDC, police and political servants of the country are -- those are individuals that are not out here fighting like we are every day, prepared to engage, especially those civilian servants and political members.

So how do I explain that more people are dying and there are less engagements? It's that there is a terrorist element that has focused on the Iraqi people and trying to kill them and keep them from achieving their vision of security and stability and democracy and freedom and economic prosperity, that's how I explain it. They have -- we have shown them very clearly that we are prepared, the coalition forces, and more and more every single day the Iraqi security forces are getting capable and credible enough to be able to defeat them, and therefore they've got to strike to discourage that during these initial phases as we ramp up their capabilities. That's why we will continue to continue to see this type of violence.

I'll take one more question, please. Yes, sir?

Q: General, you said something elliptical about Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri. Unless he dies first, do you have information from Mr. al-Douri's family, who we know -- some of whom have been detained, that the illness from which he was suffering when he visited Vienna a couple of years ago is advanced?

And in connection with that, a much broader question. It's only about a year ago that we sat in this room, listening to Mr. al-Douri telling us how the American Army would suffer defeat at the gates of Baghdad. I wonder if you'd like to tell us now, a year on, as one of the officers who planned that operation, some of your reflections on how it went, how much more difficult it proved, perhaps, than had been intended? And what do you think people in the war colleges will be saying about the American military effort here when it passes into history?

Sanchez: The first part, no, we don't have anything definitive from the family that would give us any indication that he's near death. However, we do know that he's got significant health problems. That's why I made this statement.

I think what history's going to show is that the coalition and the American military clearly was the best war-fighting force that has ever been fielded. It is a force -- the coalition service members and the American soldier, sailor, airman and Marine -- is a flexible, agile, ferocious, compassionate warrior that can adapt very rapidly across the entire spectrum of conflict. They are capable of fighting in a high-intensity conflict environment, achieving victory and then taking care of the defeated.

We have clearly shown that we have made and are capable of making tremendous strides in the rebuilding of a country that had been neglected by a dictator and oppressed by Saddam Hussein for over 30 years. And we've been able to restore freedom, some semblance of a better quality of life and economic prosperity that continues to grow every day in remarkably short period of time. And oh, by the way, in a little bit over a year, we will have restored sovereignty to the country. It will be remarkable case study in what a powerful, benevolent army can do.

Thank you all very much.

Copyright © 2003 by Federal News Service Inc., Ste. 220, 1919 M St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20036 USA. Federal News Service is a private firm not affiliated with the federal government. No portion of this transcript may be copied, sold or retransmitted without the written authority of Federal News Service Inc. Copyright is not claimed as to any part of the original work prepared by a U.S. government officer or employee as a part of that person's official duties. For information on subscribing to the FNS Internet Service, please visit [www.fednews.com](http://www.fednews.com) or call (202) 347-1400.