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Presenter: Lt. Gen. Lance L. Smith, Deputy Commanding General, U.S. Central Command **November 19, 2004 3:30 PM EST**

Defense Department Special Briefing on Operational Update on Iraq

Friday, November 19, 2004 3:30 p.m. EST

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BRYAN WHITMAN (Pentagon deputy spokesman): Well, thank you for joining us for our third briefing of the day. This afternoon we have the deputy commander of U.S. Central Command here, Lieutenant General Lance Smith, who many of you know, and who we have seen by the miracles of modern technology on our video screen up here. But he was in town, and he's agreed to give us some time this afternoon to give you a current situational update in theater.

And with that, I will turn it over to you, sir.

GEN. SMITH: Thank you.

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. It's great to be here; it really is. Sometimes this is the only opportunity we get to see our families. And so I'm back for a week, and had to come up to the city and testify before the Senate Armed Services Committee, and it gives us a chance to go over and visit the other agencies as we go through the difficult things and challenging things we're doing over in our region. So I'm pleased to be here, and I look forward to the questions after this.

I, first of all, would like to start out saying, you know, condolences to all those families and family members of coalition members and Iraqis that lost family members in the recent operations out there, of which there were a number of ongoing. The Fallujah operation was very successful, but it had a price, and all of our thoughts are with the loved ones that were lost there.

We are very pleased with operations in Fallujah. It happened the way it was planned. It was swift. There was overwhelming firepower that was put in the right place at the right time. And I wouldn't say that we are in mopping up operations; that sounds like nothing's going on. There's some intense fighting still going on in some pockets in Fallujah and we will continue until those pockets are gone.

It looks like these are some of the jihadists. We're not sure whether they're foreign fighters or local, but what we see from them is the type of people that are there prepared to fight to the very last. Some of 'em have explosive vests that they're fighting with that will, as our soldiers go into the buildings or wherever they are, we expect that they'll blow themselves up to cause further casualties. So we are slowly working ourselves through those limited areas where we still are.

We're going to find continued evidence, we think, that we've severely disrupted the insurgents' game plan as we go back and take a look at the exploitation of what we've done. As you know, we went through the city house by house. We are now going back and re-looking at some of the areas we've been to make sure that we're capturing all the information that's available out there.

There are some interesting things that have come out of this fight, and I will read some of 'em to you. In one sector of Fallujah, one unit uncovered 91 weapons caches and 431 improvised explosive devices over the last 10 days. In contrast to that, the entire Marine Expeditionary Force found 48 caches and 93 IEDs in the month of October. And in all of Iraq in the month of October, units found 130 caches and destroyed 348 IEDs. So that is an incredibly significant amount of weapons and IEDs that were found in the city.

We also found large IED-making facilities, both the kind that make the remotely controlled as well as the command detonated wire as well as facilities for making vehicle-borne IEDs. So clearly, besides being a safe haven for leadership and command and control, Fallujah was a center for making the IEDs that were being produced and used in other parts of the country to attack the coalition. And we continue to make significant finds in the city every day.

In other parts of the city, humanitarian assistance is being conducted, currently focused by the Iraqi security forces and the U.S. Marines and the soldiers that are there, handing out food and water. This is not a humanitarian crisis. The number of folks that have come out to get food and water have not been significant. We believe most of the innocent and the families left the city before the attack occurred. And we are going to continue to clear out the city and make sure it's safe before we actually allow large numbers of humanitarian organizations into the city. I can't tell you exactly when that's going to be, but we hope very, very soon. But like I said, the urgency is there to do that, but there's not a crisis that we need them -- the NGOs [non-governmental organizations] in to respond to immediately.

We'll continue to pursue that as we move towards elections in January, and we can talk about the other parts of Iraq during the question and answer period.

Looking over at Afghanistan, we are very optimistic, I would say, with some guardedness, only because we're not sure what the Taliban will do next. We think they suffered a very large defeat -- actually, we know they suffered a very large defeat -- just by virtue of the fact that elections occurred. And how they will respond to that failure remains to be seen, but we're concerned that in the run-up to the elections for the lower and upper house currently scheduled for the spring -- that we will see an increased level of violence, in an effort to try and stop those elections from occurring.

I would say -- as we look towards the Iraqi elections, I'd remind all of y'all of the skepticism a year ago about the opportunity ever to have elections in Afghanistan. And I think that bodes somewhat well for the Iraqis, in that we're seeing a similar level of interest in elections and politics with the Iraqi people that we saw with the Afghans. You'll recall we didn't expect more than about 6 million people to register in Afghanistan. We ended up with 10-1/2 million registered, and almost 9 million Afghans residents voted, of which about 40 percent were women, which would be unheard of and inconceivable two or three years ago in Afghanistan.

And they're proud of what they did. If you go talk to an Afghani, he will -- she -- he or she will show you their registration card with their picture, their thumbprint, and they'll tell you that it's the first time in thousands of

years that anybody's asked them their opinion on anything. And they gave it by going and voting.

They waited in line, oftentimes in snow up to their knees at 3:00 in morning, to make this happen. And we are hoping that we at some point in time can generate the same level of commitment to this in Iraq that we had in Afghanistan, although I will admit, given the security situation there right now and the intimidation and harassment campaigns that are going on, it will be difficult. But we're continuing to move down that road towards elections in January and then looking to elections in Afghanistan in the spring.

So that's a very small part of the AOR. As you know, we've got 27 countries in our AOR, stretching from the Sudan up to Kazakhstan and Syria and Lebanon. We tend to focus on Iraq and Afghanistan when we're dealing with you all, but there are a lot of other things going on in our area of responsibility. If you have any questions about those, I'll be glad to answer any.

Yes, sir?

Q Sir, can you tell us the date for Iraqi elections?

GEN. SMITH: The plan right now, as I understand it from the Independent Election Commission of Iraq, is 27 January. I've also heard a date of 28 January, but I think the more expected one is 27 January.

Q And are you -- what's your feeling on how widespread the voting can be, given the insurgency?

GEN. SMITH: We will see as we go through the registration period. We'll have a better feel for that in another month or so. But we are seeing a lot of interest in registration. There are some areas where we haven't been able to get the registration forms -- actually one -- Ramadi -- because of the situation, the most recent situation. But we expect to be able to get registration forms there soon. But they have gone to all of the other registration centers in the other 17 provinces. And so registration will be the key to being able to tell what response we'll get from them. But right now, it looks like it's pretty positive in that they are registering and they're moving forward.

Q And it would go ahead nationwide or --

GEN. SMITH: Nationwide. We are intent on trying to provide a secure and stable enough situation to be able to conduct nationwide elections in January. Now, I will not pretend that that's not a challenge at this stage, but we will continue along those lines.

Yes, sir?

Q General, along those same lines, yesterday when you were at the Foreign Press Center, you said that "we will make adjustments to our troop strength as elections approach." And you said that this would not amount to a huge increase in troops.

GEN. SMITH: Yes, sir.

Q I wonder if you could define that a little bit. Are you talking mainly about extending some units?

GEN. SMITH: We are talking mainly about extending some units. And you'll recall in Afghanistan we did bring some additional forces over, but a little bit different situation because we had a very small number of forces to begin with in Afghanistan. And so we will make further assessment as we get a little bit closer and as we understand what the impact of Fallujah is on the entire country. But right now we have 18 brigades' worth of forces over there. We will expect, by using extensions of some troops that were only planning on being over there for 10 months, extending them another two months so that they still would be on the ground, you know,

about a year, and using that to add additional forces over there.

The issue, by the way, is not just numbers. The issue is really about experienced troops during this period of time of expected increased violence.

Q So are you talking about, say, 20 brigades then instead of 18, or --

GEN. SMITH: I'd say we are looking at somewhere between 18 and 19. You know, it's always difficult -- well, it's always difficult to do that because when we count in brigades, we count two Marine expeditionary units as brigades and stuff. So probably an additional brigade's worth of forces. But we have not finalized that, and nor have we gotten approval through the Secretary of Defense to do some of the things that we are anticipating.

Q All right. Thanks.

GEN. SMITH: Yes, sir?

Q Would troops be kept in the country beyond a year because of this? I'm sure there are a number who have that question.

GEN. SMITH: That would not be our intent, but I would not say categorically that that would be precluded. If we believe the security situation requires that, we will make the appropriate recommendation to the secretary and through our leadership channels.

Yes, sir?

Q So you're talking about having a troop level of approximately maybe 145,000 compared to what we have now?

GEN. SMITH: That's difficult to say. We've got about 138,000 right now, I think, and I think, you know, something in excess of that. Whether it would be 145,000 or 141,000 or what I really can't tell you until we get final decisions on what we will be allowed to do.

Q Have you also ruled out the possibility of having -- like in Afghanistan, where they brought in 1,100 82nd Airborne [troops].

GEN. SMITH: We have not --

Q Have you ruled --

GEN. SMITH: We have not ruled that out. We have not ruled out using our strategic reserve forces, nor have we ruled out calling in for our division ready brigade or a force within that. But again, I think too early to try and decide that until we really see what's happening with the -- after -- in the aftermath of Fallujah.

Yes, ma'am?

Q Post-Fallujah now, can you give us a more thorough assessment of how you see the insurgency across Iraq, what the impact of Fallujah has been on the insurgency? Especially since the belief, I guess, was much of the insurgency in Fallujah was jihadists, Zarqawi loyalists, and you have said in the past you believe in other parts of the country it's more former regime loyalists. Walk us across Iraq.

GEN. SMITH: Well, let me try and characterize what we really thought was in Fallujah and what Fallujah was being used for. Clearly, it was a safe haven for Zarqawi and his group, which was not, by the way, all foreign

fighters. There were some element of Zarqawi's outfit that were foreign fighters, but also a number that were Iraqis. And he intentionally recruited Iraqis so he would have a more significant voice within Iraq.

But Fallujah was also the center of the former-regime element effort to destabilize Iraq, that as you know was always a stronghold of Ba'athist activism. And these IED factories and those sorts of things are not what we would say were necessarily part of the Zarqawi network, but more related to the former-regime elements.

And so this also operated as a command-and-control facility, and we have seen that within the city, where they built these IEDs, they had fighters, they had pretty good freedom of movement, and from Fallujah they would stage out and go into other cities and other areas to attack not just coalition forces but attack Iraqis.

And so we believe the impact of Fallujah is to have taken away a very significant safe haven, to have taken away their ability to command and control from a central location. That's not to say that they still can't work some level of coordination, but we've taken their command center away.

And we have killed a lot of insurgents, some terrorists of Zarqawi, too early to tell, but certainly a very large number of former-regime element types. And, you know, we will always -- we will debate the numbers for a while as to what they really mean, but oftentimes if the Marines say that they've killed 1,200 to 1,600 folks, you know, that's what they think, and oftentimes you find out that the wounded are considerably larger than that and the number killed are larger than that, just because we're very conservative in our estimations.

Q So do you agree with General Sattler yesterday when he said the back of the insurgency is broken?

GEN. SMITH: General Sattler is a great commander and he is focused on Fallujah and did spectacular things in there. I think it's too early for me to say, given the broad perspective Iraq, that the backbone of the insurgency is broken. We have certainly had a significant impact on the insurgency, but we know that the important part is going to be to follow on with the success and not allow a safe haven to exist anyplace else, like Ramadi or Baqubah or some of those other cities where we know these folks go.

Yes, sir?

Q General, today we saw the leader of a Sunni mosque in Baghdad taken in a bit of a firefight there. Is this the start of an approach to go against the people who are inciting violence and speaking out against the coalition, to really more directly deal with these people?

GEN. SMITH: I would say, you know, we have always had -- even under the CPA, before the turn-over of sovereignty, had a certain level of freedom to do that, that oftentimes we didn't exercise. I'm talking about the imams and the clerics that are out there really condoning violence and encouraging violence against the coalition.

I think this -- the leadership, Prime Minister Allawi, President Yawar and the other members of that leadership are prepared to be more aggressive against those that are intent on inciting whatever it is that they're trying to incite. But the jihadist violence part that is really -- the words they use often are aimed at the coalition, but the results of what they're doing are often against the Iraqi people, not the coalition, when you look at the number killed.

Q If I could take you out of Iraq for a second, in the hunt for bin Laden along the Afghan-Pakistan border and your assessment of al Qaeda as an organization, its ability from the top to communicate with the terrorists elsewhere --

GEN. SMITH: We've had some good discussions on that today. I spent the afternoon out at the -- out at Langley. And I would say, as I mentioned yesterday in the press briefing, that we are in pretty reasonable agreement that it is very, very difficult for bin Laden and Zawahiri and his other elements -- Faraz, Abu Laeth,

Hadi al-Iraqi and that group -- to operate efficiently and effectively with a command and control structure.

Hence you end up using very slow means of trying to communicate, whether it's couriers that carry compact discs, you know, from Pakistan or Afghanistan through Iran or through other countries to Zarqawi, or whether it's the use of television and other things to try and get the word out. I think it is very, very difficult for them to operate efficiently and effectively.

I think that's one of the reasons why we've focused our attention more recently on Zarqawi. Because of his location and his ability to coordinate his efforts, he has had a pretty significant effect on our operations.

Q Do you think there's communication between Zarqawi and bin Laden?

GEN. SMITH: I think there are attempted communications between Zarqawi and bin Laden. Whether or not they've been successful -- because of the huge distances involved in those lines of communication, I would say that they probably have not been. But we know for a fact that there are attempted communications between them, and they would have to be conducted over the kinds of lines that I just described.

Q Well in fact, sir, what you just said was attempted -- before you said that you were talking about couriers carrying CDs from Osama bin Laden to Zarqawi.

GEN. SMITH: I shouldn't say Osama bin Laden, but I would certainly say al Qaeda senior leadership.

Q So you believe the attempted communication has been al Qaeda senior leadership to Zarqawi, as well as Zarqawi to bin Laden? But you are saying you believe al Qaeda senior leadership has attempted to communicate with Zarqawi?

GEN. SMITH: I believe -- and I don't have anything absolutely firm in a multiple-source intelligence report or anything that can say these two guys are trying to communicate. But we do have indications that we believe they are trying to communicate. And whether it is to congratulate him on having announced that he wants to be part of al Qaeda, or whether it's to communicate and give him instructions or what it is, we don't know. But we do believe that through the process that they are trying to communicate.

Q Do you believe Zarqawi is still in Iraq?

GEN. SMITH: I believe -- I personally believe that Zarqawi is still in Iraq, yes, ma'am.

Q General, what kinds of specific information has the U.S. military gleaned from the computers and documents used at this alleged al-Zarqawi command center?

GEN. SMITH: I can't tell you right now. It's not because I won't tell you, it's because I don't know. We will go through the whole sensitive-site exploitation business within Iraq. Initial indications are that it is a fairly significant treasure trove of information. But until you actually get in there and looked at the papers -- you'll recall after we got Saddam, you know, we didn't really know what we got. And then when we examined the pocket litter and some of the other stuff that was out there, there was a certain amount of information that was very useful to us. So we would expect the same.

Yes, sir?

Q Can you perhaps -- I realize you're still going through that -- but perhaps talk about what you think of command and control among the insurgents? I mean, we had this event in Fallujah and the simultaneous breakouts in other cities. Is this centrally commanded? Is it just random?

GEN. SMITH: I wouldn't so much as say it's random, and I wouldn't call it a command and control set either. I think it is more or less broad guidance that says, okay, "If they attack Fallujah, then" -- and I think we saw some of that in Zarqawi's minute-long tape. "If they attack Fallujah, then we're going to attack lines of communications, logistics supply into the area, infrastructure and the like." And then that in turn goes out and raises the level of violence all across.

It is also evident from the early days -- I can't think of it specifically, but you'll recall some of the -- well, actually it was in April, during the Fallujah -- the last Fallujah event. You saw some fairly significant events elsewhere in the country perhaps to relieve the pressure on Fallujah, but also it was -- they gained some level of confidence because of the stand and the resistance that was in there, and it's that confidence that allowed them to go out and take action.

So that's -- I would not give them credit for a robust command and control system, but I would say that there is a certain level of talking.

Q I want to go back to this -- senior leaders from al Qaeda and Zarqawi and make sure you are saying what you are saying. Are you suggesting that there could be some al Qaeda control, direction and guidance of the Iraqi insurgency?

GEN. SMITH: I'm saying that there is a relationship between al Qaeda senior leadership and Zarqawi. How to characterize that we don't know yet, but you'll recall that when we captured one of the individuals that was trying to go back to Pakistan or wherever -- or Afghanistan, wherever al Qaeda senior leadership was at the time, that that CD was characterized as an attempt to communicate between Zarqawi and al Qaeda. We think that those attempts are still continuing. And when he made the announcement that he was a part of al Qaeda or a franchise element of al Qaeda, we are clearly thinking that that kind of link and communications will -- there will be attempts to continue that. But I don't have evidence that says so and so is walking across the border today to try and communicate with Zarqawi.

Q Well, that's a two-way street. I --

GEN. SMITH: Yes, sir. I think --

Q Zarqawi communicating with al Qaeda, al Qaeda communicating --

GEN. SMITH: I think, again, in a very difficult situation that they will try and communicate. But I cannot tell you right now that al Qaeda has said: this is what we want you to do in Iraq. I don't think they do that anyway. We don't view al Qaeda these days as being a director of operations -- or we don't see al Qaeda senior leadership as being a director of tactical-level operations. We see them as offering a large vision and guidance out there that says you- all need to hold the course and attack the coalition and attack those members of those infidels within the government and stuff. So I wouldn't characterize it as giving guidance other than broad philosophy.

Yes, ma'am?

Q General, a two-part question. Knowing what you know now about the situation in places like Mosul and Ramadi and Fallujah, what is your reasonable expectation about the likelihood that elections can be held in those cities? And number two, if they can't be held because of instability and lack of security, would the result of an election, in your view, be a legitimate result?

GEN. SMITH: I would tell you that we are going to do everything in our power to try and make it possible to have elections in January. And clearly the Fallujah attack was an effort to try and make sure that we could establish some level of security without them having that safe haven. We will see how successful we were in

that. I don't believe there will be another safe haven.

But I will tell you that the intimidation campaign that is ongoing is very effective. And we see it permeate many levels of the Iraqi government and the Iraqi security forces. You're seeing more of it daily as we see decapitated bodies in Mosul and other places. And it's that part that we have got to be able to handle and take that away from them so that people can freely get out with some level of reasonable risk to vote and not go back and expect their families to be killed just because they go out and vote. And it's going to take a certain level of courage on the part of the Iraqis, just like there was on the part of the Afghans -- Afghans, to go do that.

Q The second part of my question. If they can't vote there, would the results be legitimate, in your view?

GEN. SMITH: Well, it's an interesting way that this voting is going to occur. You know, the various groups are going to submit voting lists to try and pick the members of the National Assembly. And so, because a particular city can't vote does not mean that their leaders and their people will not be voted on by other people within Iraq. In other words, there may be Sunnis on Ayatollah Sistani's election list that would be voted upon by the entire country. And so it could be that even without, say, a city like Fallujah voting, that there would be adequate representation by the Sunnis to feel or look like it was legitimate representation for all the parties involved.

But that is not our intent. Our intent clearly is to try and make it possible for everybody to vote in Iraq that wants to vote. And that's going to take a lot of effort between now and January to establish security for each of the polling places and all of the other things that we had to do in Afghanistan. And hopefully we'll have the Iraqi security forces in large enough numbers to be able to do that.

Yes, sir?

MR. WHITMAN: We have time for a couple more here.

Q General, it's been three years from the September 11 attack, and al Qaeda is still working in the Arab world, and especially in Afghanistan and in Iraq. Who do you think is still financing and supporting al Qaeda? And do you think there's any regime in the area, in the Gulf, or in the Arab world is involved in this financing?

GEN. SMITH: I don't think that there's any regime in the Arab world that knowingly and intentionally is financing al Qaeda. I think it's clear that those moderate Arab regimes are very much at risk themselves from the extremists. And if they didn't know that before, I think they clearly know that now. You need only look at Saudi Arabia and the very important efforts that they're taking against extremists in their society.

So I have not -- I don't characterize this as a fight necessarily between al Qaeda and the West, although it's clearly characterized as that. This is also a very large fight within the Muslim community, moderates versus extremists. So any regime that would take that on and support that I think puts themselves at risk, and I don't think any of them wish to do that.

Q A follow-up to the question. Do you have any information about there is some movement inside the royal family in Saudi Arabia who are still supporting al Qaeda?

GEN. SMITH: I don't have any direct information along those lines, although I know the crown prince, Abdullah, has a very large challenge on his hands to make sure that the entire ruling family and the other leadership of Saudi Arabia is all of the same mind in the actions he's taking against the extremists.

Yes, sir?

Q General, let me ask you about another country in your area, and that's Iran. It was in the news this week. Based on the intelligence and the evidence that you look at, what is the intent and the capability of Iran to produce a nuclear bomb right now, and how far along are they along in developing the missiles to deliver them?

GEN. SMITH: Yeah, you've exceeded my technical knowledge on this stuff. I mean, actually I do go in and ask questions to try and explain -- my last tour was in Korea, so I have a pretty good understanding of highly enriched uranium and where you need to go to be able to develop a bomb. But it also involves a certain amount of miniaturization and the ability to make something small enough to fit on a warhead. Clearly, the A.K. (sic/A.Q.) Khan efforts shared information with Iran that I think is available to him and was available to him.

The question is, how far down the road of highly enriched uranium did they get, and how far are they prepared to go? Because I think, as you know or at least as I've learned, there is a peaceful use for enriched uranium, to efficiently use it in the nuclear plants. I can't tell you, just like I don't think anybody can categorically say, although there is growing evidence that gives us some cause for concern. But I certainly can't say categorically that they have gone to the point of highly enriching uranium to be able to put it on the head of a missile. Now at the same time, we see a fair amount of missile development going on, looking at extended ranges for missiles that we know have the capability to carry nuclear warheads and chemical warheads and the like.

Yes, sir?

Q The insurgent leaders who left Fallujah and other insurgents that left Fallujah, where do they appear to be setting up now? And one of the places where there was most intense fighting, other than Fallujah, during that period was Mosul. Can you explain a little bit what's -- what is going on there?

GEN. SMITH: I sure can. First of all, I'm not -- I mean, there has been a characterization that all of the insurgent leadership left Fallujah. I'm not sure that's true. Now I -- certainly some did.

I think Zarqawi sort of left his followers in the city to fight and he booked. That's what I think. I don't have any proof that he's someplace else, but we believe he did leave the city.

I'm not absolutely convinced that Omar Hadid or Sheik Janabi or the leader of -- I forget his name -- of Mohammed's Army, that those very significant leaders within the insurgent community either got out of the city, survived the attacks or are not still in there fighting with some of this resistance.

So I think it's going to take a while before we can really say that the leadership of the insurgent effort escaped Fallujah.

The others that got out, we clearly believe some of them went into Ar Ramadi. It's close. There has been an increase in violence in Ar Ramadi that indicates that some folks slipped in there.

Mosul is an interesting place. The events that occurred in Mosul do not have to have happened because people left Fallujah and went up there. There were a fair amount of people in Fallujah sufficient to be able to create problems for us. As you know, that is probably the largest area of former-regime general officers, where they retired and live up there. So it has been always an area of concern for us. And we have seen activity earlier out in Tall Afar, and we've had an increasing level of activity in Mosul before Fallujah.

Q On an opportunistic --

GEN. SMITH: I would say again an effort to relieve some of the pressure on Fallujah and force us to move forces and consider Mosul.

Now, that has always been characterized incorrectly, in my view. We never lost Mosul. What happened was there were a certain number of police stations where, when approached, when attacked by a significant number of ACMs, anti-coalition military, that the police either laid down their arms or left.

In the police stations where the police stood up and fought, all of them held their own and they maintained control of their police station and their part of the city. And then when the additional forces went in there, restored those police stations that had been overrun.

So there are some 34 police stations in Mosul. I can't tell you exactly how many were overrun, six or nine or something like that, and I wouldn't even characterize them necessarily as being overrun -- were occupied by the bad guys in some cases because the police weren't there. There are some other areas, like Baqubah -- and clearly, I think Baghdad is always a place where they can escape to in a city that large and find some level of sanctuary. But our intent absolutely is to keep the pressure on these guys and not allow them to create another Fallujah anyplace in Iraq.

Q If I could just follow up --

Q General, just to clarify, did you have confirmed kills in Fallujah, terrorist-confirmed --

Q Terrorist leaders confirmed.

GEN. SMITH: I do not. We have some indications -- and you know we get indications from a lot of different sources, that there have been some members of the leadership that either didn't make it out or have been wounded or may still be there fighting to the end. Not everybody said, "I'm out of here. You guys stick back and fight for me."

MR. WHITMAN: All right, thank you.

Q Just to clarify one thing on the breaking of the back of the insurgency issue, what evidence would you have to see that's lacking today before you broadly would make the claim that the insurgency's back has been broken?

GEN. SMITH: I would say until we can get the intimidation campaign, the widespread intimidation campaign under control, when we see people freely taking part in government, freely acting -- and I don't mean everywhere; there's always going to be -- you know, stopping intimidation is going to be a hard thing to do. And about the only way we can do that is to maintain an offensive position and go after these guys before they can do the kidnapping, before they can, you know, kill the leadership, and protect the leadership at the same time.

Q Haven't you been doing that all along?

GEN. SMITH: We have been. And --

Q What's going to be different?

GEN. SMITH: I think what's different is there's not a safe haven for them to operate out of, that they have freedom of movement. They are going to be under -- if we are successful in what we plan, is they will be under the same kind of pressure that we have put the al Qaeda senior leadership under, and it's going to be much more difficult to orchestrate the kind of things that they're doing right now.

MR. WHITMAN: Thank you, General.

Q Thank you, General.

GEN. SMITH: Thank you very much.

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