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Central Command Operations Briefing

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GEN. SATTLER: I'll just start off with a brief overview. During the course of the last 24 hours, we ran approximately 1,100 combat patrols throughout Iraq. Of significance, up on the Multinational Brigade North sector we actually ran joint patrols again with our Iraqi security force counterparts, but in addition, some of the ICDC units ran independent operations last night for the first time. So that's a great step forward up on the north sector.

In the center sector, the 1st Infantry Division continues to increase their joint patrols with Iraqi security forces, and again, using them in coordination to take down specific targets and to patrol and keep the streets safe.

The same continues in Baghdad with the 1st Cavalry Division.

Out towards the west, the Marines continue operations in Fallujah, Ar Ramadi; at the same time continuing to keep the border shut down along the Syrian border at al Qiam and then points down to the south of al Qiam.

In the center south, our coalition partners, under the command of the Polish division commander, continue operations in the center south sector. And in the east, in the southeast, our British division commander and his forces continue both engagement working with the Iraqi security forces to continue to enhance their capability, at the same time conducting combat patrols -- over 200 over the course of the last 24 hours.

We continue Operation Mountain Storm in Afghanistan, where once again we conducted operations throughout the course of the last 24 hours, along the Pakistan-Afghan border, down towards the southern region towards Kandahar. And the Marine Expeditionary Unit commenced operations up in the Uruz-gan (ph) area up in the center-slash-heartland of Afghanistan; so again, keeping any Taliban, any HIG or any al Qaeda forces off balance and under pressure throughout Afghanistan.

And in the Horn of Africa, we continue engagement with the countries of Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Yemen and Eritrea -- are continuing to work with the forces of those countries, both in civil military operations and in mil-to-mil training, to enhance their counterterrorism capability.

With that as an opening statement, I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

Q General, this is Bret Baier at Fox News Channel. Can we talk specifically about Fallujah? The engagements that we've seen over the past couple of days have been described to us as responses to enemy fire, while these negotiations are continuing. What is the hope on the ground there with the Marine commanders with these negotiations? And what is the plan for these joint patrols with Iraqi security forces? Will they start soon?

GEN. SATTLER: Bret, the Marine commanders on the ground in Fallujah are involved totally with the negotiations with the Fallujan leadership. So it's a combination of the Iraqi Governing Council, the Marine commanders, and the leadership within the town, as well as Ambassador Bremer's representation. The intent, obviously, is to come up with a peaceful solution, if possible, to go in and ensure that those who have taken the town away from the Fallujan people -- what I refer to as anti-Iraqi forces -- that they're willing to go surrender their weapons and submit to either Iraqi justice system or surrender to the coalition forces.

The Marines -- they understand the rules of engagement. Although this is a cease-fire, they're not purely defensive rules of engagement. In other words, if in fact the insurgent forces start to make attempts to set up weapons systems, to re-supply units that are within the town, the Marines have it within their rights to go in and take preemptive measures, i.e., strike against these units. Over the course of the last couple days, to include today, in those cases where the enemy has reached out and attempted, either through harassing fire against the Marine forces or they've attempted to reinforce their lines, the Marines have exercised that right and taken them under fire with both direct fire from their own organic weapon systems as well as utilizing both rotary-wing and fixed-wing close air support.

So the intent is to drive out the extremist elements inside the town and then to return order and stability to the town so that the Fallujan people can get on with their lives and move towards a fair and representative Iraqi government.

Q Thanks, General. This is Pam Hess with United Press International. Can you give us a military perspective on the strategy in Fallujah? From this side of the ocean, it looks as though that area was largely avoided for the last year except for discrete offensive operations. And what we're hearing from folks over there is that the operations are now sort of directed against cleaning out that "festering wound," I think is a quote I heard from one of them. And then there are people here that are questioning whether or not this offensive operation is just going to alienate Iraqis.

So from a military perspective can you give us an idea of why you guys are doing this? Was it just simply set off by the killing of the Black-water contractors, or is there some larger goal here?

Q Hi, Pam. The obvious goal is the goal of restoring or establishing law and order and establishing a secure environment across the entire country of Iraq so that we can move towards, you know, sovereignty, turning sovereignty back over to the Iraqi people. Before we can truly do that, there has to be a degree of security to allow, you know, the economics to move forward, to encourage investment to come into the country. Therefore, the entire country -- the rule of law has to be brought to the entire country.

Out to the west, when the Marines came in they brought in a substantially larger force than the one they replaced, with the intent of making sure that they had the forces that were necessary to go in and reestablish or establish law and order throughout the al Anbar Province, which is a very large province, which includes, obviously, Fallujah, Ar Ramadi and al Qaim, being the three major cities as you move out towards the Syrian border.

The intent all along was to go into Fallujah. The intent all along was to enhance the capability of the security forces, both the Iraqi -- the ICDC as well as the police force and to mentor those and bring those along

so that when the time came and the time was right, as the U.S. forces stepped back out or took a more distant stance from these major cities, that they would have the capability, the confidence, and they would have been mentored and brought along to the point where they could go ahead and provide their own security. And we were not at that point with the security forces at the time that the events happened inside of Fallujah. Therefore, it was only natural that the Marines moved forward to go in, restore law and order. And that is how we got to the point where we are right now.

We have -- we are comfortable we have the military capability. We are very comfortable that we have the combat support and the supporting arms that would be necessary to, if it comes to it, if we had to take Fallujah by force. But the intent -- the intent's not to take the town of Fallujah. The intent is to give the town of Fallujah back to the Fallujan people and to -- if it does require violence, that that is very precise, and that it is only used in the places where it has to be used, and that it's only used against those forces that it needs to be used against. And those would be the individuals who have taken the town away from the Fallujan people.

Q Sir, it's Pam again. Just following up, you said the intent all along was to go into Fallujah. Why weren't U.S. forces more of a presence in Fallujah before? Was it simply a question of numbers?

GEN. SATTLER: It was -- Pam, that's correct. That the -- when we had the initial forces out towards the west, we didn't have sufficient forces at that time, and that was a conscious decision to go ahead and get into all the major towns out in the western sections of the country. And it was a calculated, stepped-up process.

When the 82nd Airborne Division was in there, they did have contact with Fallujah and Ar Ramadi. They went in those cities as well, as they had a regiment that was working the border out towards the Syrian border by al Qaim, so that there was always enough presence for engagement.

But just as we moved forward and we intended to enhance the capability of the security forces, and it was a time-phased operation, you would like to get them from holding their hands up as recruits to fully capable within one week. But as we all know, it takes time, when you get into a security environment, to develop those skills and those talents. And therefore, the Marines inherited -- as the 82nd moved it along, the Marines came in behind, fully intending to continue to raise that bar, which they are doing. And that required more presence as we moved forward -- more presence in the town of Fallujah.

Q General, Steve Hedges with The Chicago Tribune. Can you talk a little bit more about the makeup of the insurgency within Fallujah, perhaps something more specific than ex-regime loyalists, and also the size of that force, your best estimates. And can you say whether a successful military operation against the insurgency in Fallujah would represent a decisive defeat for the insurgency throughout Iraq?

GEN. SATTLER: All right, Steve, I'll take the first part. We believe that there's a combination of former Ba'athist, some foreign fighters, some extremists, a combination of some Iraqi Republican Guard elements that were out there in the vicinity of Fallujah, some terrorists who have moved in from outside the country. And then there's just basically some criminals and thugs in some cases that had positions in the former regime that the only way that they knew to rule or to have power was through intimidation and coercion. And there's quite a bit of intimidation, from what we have heard, going on inside the town of Fallujah. So it's kind of a mix of those who don't have much of a future. They were thugs before the regime fell, and they'll be held accountable for their actions. They know that. And I'm sure that they believe they have no future in the new Iraq. Therefore, their only ray of hope is to ensure that they -- if at all possible, if they can derail the process of transitioning to sovereignty and bringing a new Iraqi government online.

And then the second part of the question had to deal with if we dealt a blow to these forces in Fallujah, do I feel that that would be -- it would deal a blow to all the insurgents across the country.

I think we've constantly sent the message that if they take on soldiers, they take on Marines, sailors or

airmen, that if they take us on in direct confrontation, that the end result is always that they take a severe beating. I think that if the negotiations work, they surrender their weapons and they turn themselves in to proper authorities, that's the best solution here in Fallujah. We get the town back, we reinstate the rule of law, and we move on.

If it has to come to fighting, as I've mentioned before, we just want to ensure that that fighting is as precise as it possibly can be in an urban environment, and that we limit to the best of our capability any civilian casualties or collateral damage. Unlike these thugs that are in the town, who seem to continue to find safe haven inside of mosques, inside of schools, in proximity to hospitals, anywhere they can possibly go where they know we will not, that we will be very cautious and very precise in our response. I believe that we'd deal a blow to the insurgents if, in fact, and when we bring these individuals to justice.

Q General, Eric Schmitdt with the New York Times. There have been several reports in recent days that the Army has requested more armor to go into Iraq, specifically, I believe, from the 1st Cavalry Division. Have commanders on the ground through General Sanchez and through General Abizaid made such a request? And if so, what's the status of that, and can you give us any details? And "armor" would be defined as anything from tanks to Bradleys to additional armored Humvees.

GEN. SATTLER: Hi, Eric. It's good to hear you, and thanks again for coming out and visiting with us. We really enjoyed you.

There have been some requests, both from the Marines out to the west -- keeping in mind the forces that are here now, they came through and they did their predeployment site surveys. They came in and they did an analysis of the security environment -- this would have been a couple of months back -- and they talked to the commanders who were on the ground. And as the security environment was moving in a very positive direction, the need for tanks and tracked vehicles was overshadowed by the need for wheeled vehicles and warriors on the ground. Counterinsurgency requires you to get up, to actually engage and work with the population. And that's tough to do from inside a tank, or a Bradley, or an armored personnel carrier. There's a time and place for those, and they send a very valuable message just by pulling one up to the front lines. But as these commanders did their troop-to-task -- and that's all of them -- it became evident that they would need speed and flexibility much more than they would need armored combat power, based on the security situation.

We're a very adaptive force. When we got here and the security -- when they got here and the security environment changed, they went back and did another analysis, another troop-to-task, and there was -- it was defined by a few of the commanders that they needed additional mech forces, both in the form of armored personnel carriers, and in the case of tanks. And those requests, the one that were received, came in from the Marines out to the west, and also from the 1st Infantry Division, the 1st Infantry Division in the north-center. And that armor is either here now, or it is arriving as we speak. So those requests were quickly filled based on the commander's estimate.

Q Hi, general. It's John Hendren at the L.A. Times. You had said defeating the insurgents in Fallujah would deal a blow. Can you sort of put that in perspective? Part of the justification for the cease-fire, as I understand it, has been to show the rest of Iraqis that you're waiting and were not going to exercise force unnecessarily. What you do here is going to have an impact on public opinion for the rest of Iraq. Could you just put that into perspective for us?

GEN. SATTLER: Yeah, John, I guess I would backtrack a little bit here -- that the ultimate solution inside Fallujah, which is why have the ground force commander and the MEF commander involved in negotiations with the leadership of the town, and the CPA and the CJTF-7 -- the ultimate solution is a peaceful negotiation. But the terms must be met. The arms must be turned in. The weapons must be laid down. Those who are the criminals must be either turned over or submit themselves or surrender themselves to the proper authorities.

So defeat -- I guess defeat has two terms: there's a kinetic defeat and then there's a negotiated defeat. And either one -- the primary choice would be the negotiated defeat, from our perspective. I was just, you know, speculating when I said that the message will resonate around the rest of Iraq if, in fact, and when, we either negotiate this surrender or, if necessary, we take kinetic action. I just believe that that would send a message to the rest of those who are possibly hanging on thinking that they can hold out long enough or they can hold out until they can negotiate on their terms. I think that the message will be sent that that is not a true statement and that's only a pipe dream on their part.

STAFF: Sir, this is Lieutenant Colonel Keck. There was a question about an estimate, your best understanding of the casualty -- or the insurgent number in Fallujah. Do you have an approximation or any kind of estimate of how many enemy are in that area?

GEN. SATTLER: That's tough to nail down on a number. I have -- I see multiple briefings from multiple sources. It's tough if you don't have all eyes inside the town. But I've seen -- probably the closest number, or the one that I think I would hang my hat on if I had to, is somewhere around 1,500, plus or minus. And that's a small, very small portion of the population.

Q Sir, this is Tony Capaccio with Bloomberg News. Had a couple questions.

One, on the force requirement issue, on armor. You did not mention Strykers at all. Do you see a need to bring in that second brigade from Fort Lewis? You're aware of this memo from Lieutenant General Larry Ellis at FORSCOM suggesting more Strykers vis-a-vis up- armored humvees.

And two, the whole issue of precision in an urban environment. Could you give a little tutorial, quick? And how do you accomplish that between coordination with the Air Force AC-130s and the Marines on the ground -- giving the public a little perspective on how you would do that without destroying whole blocks and people.

GEN. SATTLER: Tony, on the Stryker. The Stryker is an unbelievably capable vehicle, as are the warriors who operate it. And as you know, we have the Stryker brigade right now up in the Multinational Brigade North; the Stryker brigade is the core up there. We have taken one of those Stryker battalions -- (off mike) -- that brigade, and we've moved it down. But because of its capability to assist in clearing the main supply routes -- and that's doing a marvelous job, as you would expect -- there is no need right now for an additional Stryker brigade in the country.

What we will do is we will take that additional Stryker brigade, when it's time to swap out the one in the north. Because of its capability and its speed and its flexibility to cover large areas, it's the perfect unit to go back up to the north and then cover the entire Multinational Brigade North sector. So rather than bring them in now, Tony, when we don't feel we need them, we have sufficient up- armored Humvees, we have sufficient Bradleys, we have sufficient other mechanized vehicles that give us the mobility that's necessary that we're going to hold the Stryker brigade until it's time to bring it in to replace the one that's currently in the north.

Concerning the precision strike, the munitions that we have -- laser-guided munitions and those that -- you know, the JDAMs that are available -- are extremely accurate. But what it requires -- it requires the commander on the ground to determine the target and provide the positive identification of the target, the positive location of the target, and then to also do the assessment on the collateral damage -- in other words, what unintended consequences would have (sic) by striking that particular target.

The commander formulates that. He then talks to his forward air controller, and they figure out how they're going to designate which building in an urban environment, or if there was an open area inside the middle of town, they could also perform the strike there.

So the intent, Tony, is to go ahead and pick the targets, ensure that you've exhausted the capabilities that

you have organic to you. And if the time is right and it's necessary, for all the right reasons, then we'll go ahead and bring in either an AC-130 or a fixed-wing platform to drop our precision-guided munitions, or that there's a rotary wing CAS with anything from a TOW missile to other precision weapons that the rotary wing could also fire.

So it's very calculated. It's one footing at a time. And it's exactly as you've described it when you used the word "precision."

Q Hi, General, it's John Lumpkin with the Associated Press. I was calling -- or I was going to ask to what degree do the bombings and insurgent attacks across Iraq emanate from Fallujah and Anbar province?

And also, how much of your -- of the current problem is Anbar province-wide? What other operations are under way around the province, and how are they tied to Fallujah?

GEN. SATTLER: All right. Hey, John, so you were calling -- I appreciate the call. So this is on your bill, huh?

On the bombings, or on activities outside of Al Anbar province, the activities throughout the north, the central, the Baghdad region, as well as down in the south central and the southeast, the enemy activity, attacks against our forces have just about now reduced themselves down to the rate that they were before the Fallujah operation started. So that we've noticed it decreased back down till it settled into about the status quo concerning enemy activity. So I would say that at this point, although I'm sure that the rest of Iraq is keeping an eye on the activities and events in Fallujah, that they are not a catalyst at this point for additional activities across the rest of the country.

Concerning the second part of the question -- John, what was your second question, please?

Q Thanks. I'm calling you back now. It's sort of how much -- so much of the focus has been on Fallujah, and I wanted to connect that to all of Anbar Province. How much is that province a problem in terms of insurgency? And what kind of operations are going on in other places; how are they connected to Fallujah?

GEN. SATTLER: Good question, John. We've been conducting offensive operations throughout the entire province. If you remember, before Fallujah even showed on the map or came into the limelight, we had conducted some heavy operations out by al Qaim along the Syrian border, where we interdicted individuals who were coming across the border, supplies, et cetera coming into Iraq, and had some pretty heavy fighting up there. We continue to patrol, we continue to do offensive operations in that region.

Ar Ramadi, we had some initial heavy fighting in Ar Ramadi. We continue to occupy positions in and around Ar Ramadi and we continue to patrol in Ar Ramadi to make sure that the rule of law stands fast there.

While we have the cordon around Fallujah and some forces in the initial -- on the outskirts of the town around three sides, we've also conducted operations in towns up to the northwest of Fallujah, also to the northeast of Fallujah, and also directly to the south, to ensure that any potential foreign fighters, extremists, former Ba'athists who had fled the town and attempted to go ahead and find safe harbor, to re-arm, refit, to potentially plan, that we kept those disrupted and off balance. So we have been out to those areas. We've conducted offensive operations. And we continue to patrol to keep those under our control.

STAFF: Just a couple more, sir.

GEN. SATTLER: Two more questions?

STAFF: Two more questions.

GEN. SATTLER: Okay. My handler here says I've got time for two more questions.

Q General, this is Jim Mannion from AFP. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about the insurgents inside Fallujah and how they're led, whether there's sort of a single leader or a single sort of web of command in there even though there are disparate groups fighting, and also how they've responded to the -- you know, to the pressure that they've been under in recent days, and whether they've been able to re-supply.

GEN. SATTLER: Jim, we have not been able to determine any single leader. There appears to be a loose federation of individuals who have come together with a common cause, and in this particular case it's to derail the process as we move towards sovereignty and to make life tough for all intents and purposes on the people of Fallujah. We have ensured -- the Marines have ensured that humanitarian equipment, that rations, that water, that fuel gets into the town to ensure that the hardship on the people has as limited an effect as it possibly can. So they've actually escorted and permitted those type of convoys to go on in.

I'm sure that, based on the intimidation and based on some of the reports that we've heard from folks who have come out of the town, that these insurgents, these anti-Iraqi forces that are there take what they need when they need it, take it from the people. So whether or not they're experiencing the hardship of a lack of food, water, et cetera I really can't comment on. But what we can tell you is that the people in the town are starting to become more and more disgruntled with the occupation, want to get on with their lives, and have made it very clear that they're willing to, in some cases, point these individuals out; to go and assist the coalition forces if in fact the time comes where we do have to move in.

STAFF: Okay. Sir, I think we have time for one more question. We're going to go to AP.

Q General Sattler, this Bob Burns from AP. I want to take you back to a statement you made earlier when you were asked about why U.S. forces hadn't taken control in Fallujah earlier on in the war, and I think you said something to the effect that there weren't sufficient forces. And I was wondering if you could elaborate on that, whether you meant there were not sufficient forces put in the Sunni Triangle by design, or there were not enough forces in total in Iraq to put enough in the Fallujah area.

GEN. SATTLER: Bob -- what I meant, Bob, was at the time, you know, the commander on the ground was orchestrating his forces. In this case it was the 82nd Airborne Division. The commander on the ground was utilizing, pushing his forces, training Iraqi security elements, utilizing his forces in both Fallujah, Ar Ramadi, and out to the west by the Abu Ghraib area. He was very, very active in engaging and working those towns.

When I indicated that there weren't sufficient forces, I mean you can't do everything at all time to all locations. When you fight a counterinsurgency, what you require is the ability to go in and precisionly (sic) mass your force at the right time and in the right quantity. So we had sufficient forces and we have sufficient forces today throughout the country. And I can honestly say, if we needed more, as General Abizaid said multiple times, that we could -- we would request, and the secretary of Defense has stated, and has come through every time we've ever asked for anything, like the tanks, et cetera, that that has in fact been provided.

So the forces were sufficient, it was just that the priority of work, the priority of effort was focused in other areas. And when the Marines came in, it was time -- and it was decided ahead of time by the Marine commander that when they did come in, that they were going to go ahead and turn that priority towards the towns of Fallujah and Ar Ramadi and al-Qiam. A matter of priority more so than a matter of sufficient forces, Bob.

STAFF: Okay, sir. We appreciate you spending time with us today. We hope to talk to you again.

GEN. SATTLER: Okay. Thanks a lot everyone. Take care of yourselves. I'm out here.

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