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**Presenter: Chief of Staff for Multinational Corps-Iraq, Brig. Gen. Joseph Anderson    February 01, 2008 12:00 PM EST**

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**DoD News Briefing with Brig. Gen. Anderson at the Pentagon, Arlington, Va.**

MODERATOR: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the briefing room. We have with us today Brigadier General Joseph Anderson, chief of staff of Multinational Corps-Iraq. General Anderson has been to us three times now in his corps and headquarters and, you know, reaching end of their deployment, and we're happy to have them with us. He's at Camp Liberty today in Baghdad.

So with that short introduction, sir, I'm going to turn it over to you for your opening comments.

GEN. ANDERSON: Okay. Thanks, Gary.

First some opening remarks, and then I'll take some questions. Good morning to you all, and thanks for this opportunity. As many of you know, Multinational Corps-Iraq's reins will be turned over this month to Lieutenant General Lloyd Austin and his 18th Airborne Corps staff. While the headquarters will change, the common goal of securing the people of Iraq and building upon the gains realized since the beginning of the surge will continue.

The 18th Airborne Corps has much work ahead, and they will undoubtedly bring a great deal of energy to the fight. The country-wide operation Phantom Phoenix continues as we pursue al Qaeda in Iraq and other extremist elements. Supporting operations are focused on neutralizing extremist attempts to regroup, reorganize and renew their combat strength. Previous success against al Qaeda in Anbar and Baghdad for some of the enemy to move into the Diyala River Valley, in an effort to survive and re-establish an operational base. Approximately 60 percent of attacks now occur in the north. We will not allow al Qaeda and other extremists to take sanctuary in any part of the country. However, Phantom Phoenix is not limited to the north. It integrates operations from across the country. We are not leaving safe areas or holes. Equally important is the fact that we will not give up gains already achieved by the coalition.

In the last week of operations, the overall number of attacks nationwide remained down and below the average of the past three months.

We have seen a rise in coalition and civilian casualties since last month; however, Iraqi security force casualties have been reduced. We are also increasingly finding and clearing improvised explosive devices. This is undoubtedly due to the improved cooperation from Iraqi citizens, who continue to forcefully reject extremism.

The security situation today is about the same as we experienced statistically in early 2005. Weekly attacks in the Baghdad security districts for the past 15 weeks matched the levels last seen consistently during mid-2005. Improvised explosive device incidents increased last week, but remained below the long-term average for the 23rd week in a row. The IED found-and-cleared rate was 62 percent, the highest in nearly four years. Iraq-wide, weekly casualties decreased by 3 percent last week, thereby continuing to remain below the long-term average for the 21st week in a row.

Critical to the success of Phantom Phoenix, as I just described, is our partnership with the Iraqi security forces. They continue to play a viable and important role in everything that we do on a daily basis. Iraqi citizens also continue to reject extremist elements. This crucial element is another aspect of providing security throughout Iraq. The people feel more secure, and they are increasingly more willing to provide useful information to our forces.

The extremists' ability to intimidate the populous is clearly diminishing. Iraqi citizens across the country are actively engaging the extremists. The concerned local citizens groups have enabled us to find extremists, criminals, weapons and munitions caches and increase the people's cooperation with the government of Iraq. Reconciliation efforts are critical for the government and its citizens to maintain long-term security. The concerned local citizens groups now number about 80,000-strong throughout the country.

Improving essential services, economic development and local governance capability and capacity are also important elements that we are pursuing. We are fostering programs such as the establishment of a civil service corps, awarding microgrants and creating and developing vocational-technical courses. A recent example of improving the economy is the January 23rd completion of the first instrument landing system at Baghdad International Airport. This paves the way for civilian airline inclement weather capability, thereby increasing the capacity of the airport to serve as a conduit for commerce 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We also facilitated a meeting for 135 local business owners at the Arab Labour governance center, designed to improve their business practice skills and knowledge.

Along with ongoing operations, we also certainly welcome progress towards the passage of more key legislation. The parliament recently passed the Accountability and Justice Law, which is an important step forward. We also look forward to passage of the provincial powers law and other legislation. We have to continue to move forward in all aspects of national and governmental issues to achieve success and accomplish our mission.

Thanks for your attention, and I'm now ready to take your questions.

MODERATOR: Okay. I'll remind you that he can't see us, so please tell him who you are and where you're from.

Kristin?

Q Sir, it's Kristin Roberts with Reuters.

First, I'm hoping you can put some numbers to that increase in coalition and civilian casualties that you cited in your opening comments. And also, second, what can you tell us about the two very large bombings in markets in Baghdad today and who might be responsible for those, whether it's al Qaeda or some other group?

GEN. ANDERSON: Okay. I think the best number to give you in terms of the civilian casualties -- for January a year ago, it was 1,700 civilian casualties for the month; for January 2008, it was 170. So a significant drop in numbers. Significant drop. I don't have the stats in front of me exactly on our casualties, but the casualties are remaining at the 2005 levels, very successful events and operations in country, which have reduced those

figures.

All indications today -- it's still early here in figuring out what happened in the pet market. As you know, it was targeted November, it was targeted January and targeted today. Indications are it is AQI, but that's only the initial feed right now. We think about 45 injured there. Those numbers are still being assessed as well. But it appears to be the sensational type attack of AQI character, from what our assessment is right now.

Q I'm sorry, sir. Did I mishear you in the beginning where you said there was an increase in civilian and coalition casualties over the past month?

GEN. ANDERSON: No, no. I compared January '07 to January '08, and I gave you the civilian casualty rates for Iraq for local civilians was 1,700 in January '07, and that's down in the 170 arena for January '08.

Q Can you give us the number for December '07?

GEN. ANDERSON: For December '07? I don't have December '07.

Q Thank you.

MODERATOR: Courtney.

Q Hi, General. This is Courtney Kube from NBC News. I also have a question from your opening statement. I believe you said that attacks are down below the average of the past three months. Can you explain that a little bit more? Are these attacks on coalition forces? What kind of attacks are you seeing? Presumably they're in the northern area that you are talking about, but, you know, give us an idea of where in the region you're seeing them primarily.

GEN. ANDERSON: Oh, I'm talking in totality, so you're right. I mean, by province, by location, the attacks rates are down, and that's a combination of attack on coalition forces, Iraqi security forces and the populace.

What I talked about in the statement, which we were just talking about a minute ago, the civilian casualties country-wide are down. So I was comparing January '07 to the past month here, January '08, for a figure.

The attack rates on the coalition have also been down. And of course, you know December was a monumental month. December of '07 was a monumental month here for us in terms of lowest casualties back to the beginning of the war.

By province, the north has experienced more casualties on coalition forces and Iraqi security forces because of the focus up there as part of Phantom Phoenix. As we've said, Phantom Phoenix is a country-wide operation, heavily focused Diyala, south of Baghdad, and obviously Nineveh province. And the attacks that have occurred in Nineveh here in the past week to two are because of an increase of coalition forces up there, an increase of Iraqi security forces up there, and, of course, an increase in operations at large. So they are experiencing higher numbers than other parts of the country.

Q Thank you.

What are the numbers of attacks? Do you have the monthly for the past couple months to give us an idea, a range? And then also, what's your explanation or what's your theory about, if the attacks are down against coalition forces for the month of -- presumably for the month of January, why were there more coalition casualties in January than there were in December?

GEN. ANDERSON: Again, I was only giving you one reference point; the civilian numbers were down.

The coalition casualties: The number for December was 32, I believe. And I'm going off of memory so I don't have all those stats in front of me, but the numbers were very low.

And, of course, January went up for exactly the reasons we're talking about, the increased operations and the Phantom Phoenix offensive operations kicking off. And that's what generated the preponderance of casualties for the month of January '08. I'm talking coalition. And again Iraqi security forces are also experiencing upwards of a two-thirds increase because of the amount of operations they're doing.

The numbers of attacks are dramatically down. Again effective attacks yesterday were 13 out of 32 attacks nationwide. Again those are a combination of all types of attacks -- attacks on coalition, on Iraqi security force.

Those are small arms; those are IEDs. Yesterday it was 42 IEDs and 21 found and cleared. So the numbers are fairly constant in that category, but the found and cleared range is hovering now. It did reach as high as 60 percent. It's hovering. Like, yesterday it was right at 50 percent. The found and cleared rate is going very, very well, but the number of IED instances -- in the 40 to 50-ish number day to day.

Q Hi, General. Richard Lardner from the Associated Press.

I wanted to double check something I thought you said, but you can tell me. Did you say the security situation is about the same now as it was in 2005 in your opening statement? And also on the IEDs, you said the clear rate is about 62 percent. What do you attribute that to primarily: technology, intelligence, all of the above? Can you give us a better feel for that?

GEN. ANDERSON: Sure, sure.

What I was talking about up front was, the situation is very similar to what it was '04, '05 timeline, again, primarily measured by attacks, by the number of attacks, wound and killed rates. Incidents in the country are at the low time levels that they were '04, '05 time frame, minus the spike we had in the spring of '04.

The IED found and cleared rate is primarily increased because of cooperation with the local populace. The local populace is identifying many caches, many locations, many actual where roadside devices are, deep-burieds are, all those types and where factories and caches, et cetera. So they're been very helpful and of course, the tactics, techniques, procedures used by our forces have gotten better and better. And the technologies of course certainly reinforce that. But the number one reason the found and cleared is higher is because of locals telling forces where these devices are.

MODERATOR: AI.

Q General, it's AI Pessin for Voice of America.

From your perch, having the nationwide sense of the situation, what's your view of what the impact of ending the surge will be? And do you believe that it will be advisable to have some sort of a pause in withdrawals at that point? Or do you think it's going to be solid enough to continue taking out about a brigade a month for the rest of the year?

GEN. ANDERSON: I think the impact of the surge will allow us to, as we get through Phantom Phoenix and approach the summer, will allow us to maintain the current levels of stability. And again that's the exact number of BCTs that we accepted, received here when we took over in December of '06.

The question's going to be: How do you maintain that stability and security for the remainder of the calendar year to allow the governance, economics progress that we're realizing here every day to maintain that level and again to generate jobs, improve the economy, improve provincial capacity capability throughout the year? Fifteen will certainly allow us to maintain that. The question becomes, the conditions that will drive the drawdown of other BCTs, and that is exactly what the debate is. And all the dialogue you've seen here in the last couple days, the question's really become what would allow us to do that, and then what school of thought you want to follow on how rapidly you should do that.

But the real issue is the conditions based on trends, everything from what we're talking about -- attack rates, casualty rates, sectarian violence and stability and where you can afford to drawdown. Each province is different, as we talked about a little bit earlier. Each place allows us to do different things based on what's going on with the Iraqi security forces a combination of the Army and police, Iraqi special operations forces, mortars and other factors. But the whole issue of how fast and when is going to continue to require -- continuing to require an assessment here based on the maintenance of the conditions or improved conditions is really the ideal state for the months to come.

MODERATOR: Well, General, you mentioned political progress, but that's one of the big criticisms; is that although security has improved, we haven't seen the political progress that we would need to see that could potentially contribute to continued reduced violence in a situation with fewer U.S. troops. What's your assessment of the progress so far and also any signs that you see that would indicate what progress or lack of progress we might see in the coming months?

GEN. ANDERSON: I think the key thing is the government of Iraq's continued progress in the legislative arena, as we kind of highlighted here in the opening remarks. Provincial budgets are about approved, and they demonstrated capacity to give to provinces. 2007 was a phenomenal year for provincial budget execution. The fact they received one, they were able to run a capital budget and run operations and maintenance budgets was phenomenal. The de-Ba'athification law, obviously, is a step in the reconciliation right direction, to make sure everybody gets a place at the table, everybody gets a vote and everybody gives away together to work on the future -- be it security, be it economics, be it governance.

The real test, I think -- we think, is provincial powers law. We need the provinces to be empowered to do the things that they need to do, just like we have, you know, a central government, state government back home to allow them to run all the different elements from agriculture to education to health care to enable them and empower them to get all the work they have to get done, and how we separate the central government from the provinces.

From our vantage point, we are very heavily focused on the provinces. The success we've had with Provincial Reconstruction Teams both embedded and paired, the two types we have, and how they have continued to coach, counsel provincial councils, provincial governors along to make the right calls and further their people along by province has been fairly phenomenal. So I think a continued trend go in that direction is what we are optimistic about this coming year, and we think that will be an impetus for the central government to pick up more of the same. But indications are governance at the national level is improving.

Q General, this is Guy Raz from NPR. To what extent does continued -- the continued reduction in violence over the coming months depend on Sadr's movement recommitting to its cease-fire pledge?

GEN. ANDERSON: We think it's clearly a help. The question becomes of his mainline elements that are part of his militia he actually controls -- how much of that he actually does control clearly has been a factor. And the other element becomes these special groups, rogue elements or whatever term you want to assign them with, how they follow his orders or do not follow his orders in terms of using his name or doing acts to, again, increase power, sectarian violence and control of areas around the country; obviously, predominantly south, a little bit east of the capital and inside the capital itself. But it clearly is a -- does help to have that in place, and we'd like to see

it stay in place.

Q General Odierno, a few days ago, had told us about how your staff is in touch through interlocutors with the movement regularly. Are you fairly confident that that they will recommit to the cease- fire?

GEN. ANDERSON: I think I'd have to say now -- yes, now. I would never -- I wasn't real sure back in the summer, I don't think any of us were sure back in the summer as we were working all the reconciliation efforts at really a grass-roots level, trying to have that migrate towards the central government. But clearly, the indications are in what's happened here these past few months that it is viable, it has been viable, it's made a difference, and I think we're more of a believer now than we were before. I think it has manifested itself and proven to help reduce the amount of violence in and around Baghdad.

Q Yes, General, this is Kernan Chaisson with the Journal of Electronic Defense.

Last week, I asked General Odierno about the -- what he had learned concerning electronic warfare, signals intelligence, those sorts of things during his tour. He said the key was moving a lot of the control and a lot of personnel down further to the front, down to unit level. Could you expand on that, please?

GEN. ANDERSON: I sure can. Through cooperation with the Navy, the Army has -- the electronic warfare officer training has been greatly enhanced back at -- back in CONUS. And what's happening now is trying to get that level of expertise down to the battalion level. I believe General Odierno told you that we were assigning these electronic warfare officers -- we call them EWOs -- down to the battalion-level Army focus at the brigade combat team level. And then division-level and higher, we're still working with the Navy experts who have taught us a lot in that field.

And the key thing has been that level of training and assignment down to the lower levels has allowed us to better integrate all those technologies much closer to the front without having to filter that down through a division headquarters and has improved the interoperability. The air weapons teams have been much more successful. Many of the other intelligence systems and the signals intelligence and all the crew -- all the counter-IED devices that help us defeat electronically everything from remote phones, cell phones, you know, remote wiring devices, that capability is much more enhanced now at the smaller unit level than it was a year ago.

MODERATOR: Luis?

Q General, it's Luis Martinez with ABC News.

If I could follow up on your comments to AI, as you go down to 15 combat brigades and you assess the potential impact on the security situation of getting down to 15, what's a suitable length of time for you to feel comfortable in assessing the impacts on the security situation?

GEN. ANDERSON: You came in very hard to understand. Are you asking about the drawdown to 15, what the impact's going to be, or below that? I couldn't tell.

Q It's more about the length of time that you take to assess, when you get down to 15. What makes you comfortable? What length of time makes you comfortable, where you think you can get a good trendline, so then you can keep going on for further reductions if that's the case?

GEN. ANDERSON: I think the key thing there is going to be the partnership with the Iraqi security forces. Obviously our increased boots on the ground allowed us to go do more and stay longer in many places in the country. The key piece that's going to allow us to assess that's going to be the ability of the Iraqi security forces -- as they expand now upwards of, you know, over a half a million, 550,000 combination, you know, a little over 200K army, and the rest of the difference is IP -- how they hold the ground, which allows us again to focus in

an overwatch capacity.

I think that's going to be the difference: the ability where we are still engaged with them, partner with them. The transition teams continue to work with them day in and day out, but the ability of us to be in an overwatch support role, everything from logistical support, aviation support, indirect fire support, some of the more difficult functions, while they do the day-to-day security of the neighborhoods, districts, towns, within the provinces, the infrastructure. And the comfort level of watching how successful they are in doing that will be a huge determining factor in how much faster and at what pace we should go further down from this summer.

MODERATOR: Go ahead.

Q If I could follow up real quick, do you have a guesstimate of maybe how many months, do you think, that that kind of assessment will take to develop for you guys?

GEN. ANDERSON: I don't. I mean, there are lots of numbers being thrown around, but it wouldn't be prudent for me to, I mean, mine would just be an opinion. There's -- the whole planning assessment is ongoing and all the factors we're talking about: How well do the concerned local citizens, how viable do they become, as part of a government contract, as part of the Iraqi security forces, their integration into those structures?

The Iraqi security forces I just talked about. The provincial powers act and all those different criteria across all those fronts -- economics, governance and security -- are all going to be factors. But right now it would be purely speculation if I gave you a number and said whatever it would be.

MODERATOR: Kristin.

Q Sir, it's Kristin Roberts with Reuters again.

We heard this week that some soldiers in the North were exposed to chlorine when clearing out some weapons. This is the first time in just months and months that we've heard about weaponized chlorine, and it's been almost a year since commanders warned that this could be a new tactic of the insurgency.

Why did that not materialize? What happened to keep chlorine bombs from becoming the weapon you thought they were going to become?

GEN. ANDERSON: It was primarily a supply issue. The chlorine supply that was coming into the country to obviously purify the water was obviously a target. When lots of other accelerants to explosives were cut off from getting in, chlorine kind of became a -- and that whole homemade explosives episode we had back in the spring, early summer -- kind of became the weapon of choice when a lot of the improvised explosive device, suicide vehicle, house-borne, deep-buried, all those types were kind of cut off.

We dealt quite a bit with chlorine last spring when some of this materialized up through the summer, and what this was was a cache once again where the containers were in there. There's obviously still locations where we're going to find it. But it has not been used to any extent -- and I'm going by memory now -- at least early summer since we've had to deal with that, and we just happened to find a cache site that actually had some containers, barrels of that stuff that were in there, which got them exposed a little bit -- fortunately, not seriously. But that's kind of what drove them to go that route. It's a lot more controlled and regulated as it comes across the borders and protected now as it moves in, because it actually had an impact on some of the chlorination of the water here, again, late -- mid -- summer time frame. So that's what drove it. This is the first time, though, we've come across it in a long time.

Q Sir, this is Fred Baker, American Forces Press Service. When you talk about -- when you say you're not leaving safe havens or holes, are you leaving primarily Iraqi security forces and the -- or concerned local

citizens in those places to keep al Qaeda from coming back? And when you talk about locals being more comfortable giving tips for where bombs and the bomb factories are to coalition forces, how is the competence level with local citizens in Iraqi forces and Iraqi police? Where is that -- is that confidence level back up or are they concerned about retaliation and issues within the police?

GEN. ANDERSON: Well, I'll answer that one first. The confidence level is higher. I think they feel more secure, and many of them, by the expanded role of the Iraqi army and improving police forces, are more comfortable in passing information. And I think -- to try and simplify it, really, it's two issues. One is many of them are very frustrated by what they've seen happen to their family members, relatives, and they've just had enough; and the impact that it's had on their quality of life. And number two is they very -- you know, the tips do work as a very healthy rewards program, which also rewards people financially for giving information. That is one of our -- the microgrants program is a huge program for getting people jump-started on small business. That's been a huge success this past year, and the rewards program has been a huge success. So I -- there's a couple reasons, but the confidence level and their trust factor with all that is much better.

On the holes and gaps it's really an issue of two things, and you're right, one is how do we make sure we have more of an Iraqi security force presence to avoid -- mitigate these gaps or seams in areas that we haven't had a lot of activity and the concerned local citizens, which are starting, by the way, a new name, new terminology being used here, Sons of Iraq; between Awakening movements and the Sons of Iraq, how they secure their local areas to make sure that people that are going to come in there to destroy water supplies, power supplies, medical facilities, et cetera, don't get that opportunity.

So a combination of ISF growth, capability, capacity and the integration of the CLCs, Sons of Iraq version, Awakening's version, and again how we monitor based on what the coalition forces do; where we go, based on what we know, what we think is also a factor there, and the ability to do that. Because they will continue to move when we're not, and it's going to be -- that's part of the pursuit operation.

MODERATOR: One more.

Q General, Bill McMichael with the Military Times papers. There's been a lot of retaliatory action by groups -- insurgent groups against the leaders of the tribes that have come over to the U.S. side, if you will, in the effort to stabilize things in Iraq.

What sort of impact would you assess that retaliation has had? And do you see a slowdown in the number of groups -- tribal groups that are coming over to the U.S. to align themselves with U.S. forces and ISF?

GEN. ANDERSON: No, we don't see any reduction in tribal support. Tribal support continues to be strong, continues to grow. And that's one of our challenges; the support for the many tribal members to come over and be part of these different groups has grown beyond expectations in size and in speed, very rapidly, to a very effective measure. And of course, the issue is how much we can get transferred over, how quickly over to the Iraqi security forces. But that's gone very well.

And you know, retaliation -- these are some very brave, all these volunteers -- and there are two types, the volunteers and the ones who are actually under contract and the ones that, obviously, migrate over to the security forces -- are some strong patriots, very brave folks. And there have been many acts of intimidation, and of course there is infiltration of those organizations. But people have remained strong and committed, dedicated to their cause to provide security for the people and preserve and protect their way of life. It's been phenomenal. But there's been no indications of any of that being diminished, only being strengthened.

MODERATOR: Well, sir, we appreciate your time today. And we look forward to your return with your corps headquarters not very long down the road. We appreciate your efforts and all that you've done in Iraq. And we'd like to provide you with an opportunity to give any final comments that you'd like to make.

GEN. ANDERSON: Well, thanks. Well, first, thanks for your wishes. It's less than two weeks, but who's counting? But what I will tell you is it's been a very fulfilling 15 months for everybody in this corps.

And number one, we thank you for your support, the press corps and support trying to get accurate information out to the American public, to all our soldiers and their families, very, very important.

What I will tell you all is that the coalition is as strong as it ever has been. Our soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines continue to do phenomenal work around here. You can see the enthusiasm. You can feel the pride they have. It's a very tangible feeling of success here, and they know it. And you can see it everywhere you go, any part of the country.

And again, the challenges will continue to be thrown at us, but the resolve of both the Iraqi security forces and the coalition forces and these Sons of Iraq and Awakening Movements have made significant contributions. And I think you'll continue to see that over time.

And the key thing is to continue to maintain stability, if not enhance it, to allow the economic and governance progress to continue at a better rate. And again, our focus remains provincial capacity to hopefully swell towards central government capacity, central governance. And we continue to see steps in that direction every day.

But thanks for your support and all that, and we wish you all well and hope to see you all back in the States here at some point.

MODERATOR: Thank you, sir. Thank you all for coming.

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