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Presenter: Commanding General, Multinational Division-Baghdad Maj. Gen. Jeffery Hammond

**June 02,
2008**

DoD News Briefing with Maj. Gen. Jeffery Hammond from Iraq

MODERATOR: Well, good morning everyone. Welcome to the briefing room again. We have with us today Major General Jeffery Hammond, who's the commanding general of Multinational Division-Baghdad and the 4th Infantry Division.

This is General Hammond's first time with us today. Let me make sure that he can hear us.

Sir, can you hear us okay?

GEN. HAMMOND: Thank you. I can hear you quite well, thank you.

MODERATOR: Excellent.

General Hammond is at Camp Liberty in Baghdad and he command -- started command of operations in December 2007. So with that, we will turn it over to General Hammond for his opening comments and then we'll come back here for questions.

Sir, over to you.

GEN. HAMMOND: Okay, thank you.

Good morning. I am Jeff Hammond. I serve over 30,000 soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines -- and their families as well -- as commander for Multinational Division-Baghdad. We've been in Iraq now for six months. We're a part of a 15-month tour. I'd like to start off by providing you a report on what I see as our progress.

Now, in Baghdad, our mission is unchanged. It's to protect the people. We accomplish this by defeating the enemies of Iraq, improving the Iraqi security force's capability through partnership, developing the Iraqi police capacity, supporting political and economic growth, ultimately transitioning the Iraqi security forces in their

responsibility for overall security.

Now, I would not characterize our current situation as being at a turning point, but having said that, there was significant process in the security line of effort in the month of May. The performance of the Iraqi forces was heartening and contributed enormously to this success. They are the ones extending security into Sadr City and they have found over 83 weapons caches. The fact is, the Iraqi security forces are increasingly carrying the load here in Baghdad, and our task now is to exploit the opportunities provided by these operations and to prevent the enemies of Iraq returning to make life miserable in the neighborhoods.

Now, who are these enemies of Iraq? They are those who operate outside the rule of law: criminals and terrorists who threaten security and progress, whatever their motivation or goals.

Now, there's two main groups of enemies that we currently face here in Baghdad. The first is terrorists such as al Qaeda. Now, you're aware of al Qaeda's motives and their methods, and the Iraqi people are as well. And they've turned against them. We have severely disrupted their networks and their operations.

An indication of their despicable nature is the fact they're using unwitting women and children to execute attacks. It was just recently on the 26th of May that al Qaeda used a 14-year-old boy up in Tarmiya, which is north of Baghdad, to conduct an attack against an Iraqi police checkpoint. Now, as the boy approached a checkpoint, al Qaeda detonated an explosive emplaced in his Moped, killing the youngster, one Iraqi policeman and three Sons of Iraq volunteers.

Now, in partnership with the Iraq security forces, our forces have killed or detained 430 al Qaeda in Iraq in the past six months, ranging from senior leaders to media experts, to attack coordinators, facilitators and operators. We continue to pursue them relentlessly.

The second group is the special group criminals. Those formerly affiliated with Jaish al-Mahdi who now operate as illegal armed groups jeopardize the security of citizens and neighborhoods. We've killed or detained 455 special group operatives in the last six months. Now, intelligence report indicates that these criminals receive support from elements in Iran. This support primarily comes in the form of weapons, training, and a destination to avoid capture.

Now, regarding the weapons supply, I can tell you some weapons recovered in Baghdad were identified as being produced in Iran. The most recent data production was February 2008. We also know many special group criminals that we target have recently fled to Iran as well.

Now, our most recent operation - as you're well aware of -- focused in Sadr City. Now, soon after our arrival here back in December, we recognized the need to address the threat to Iraq posed by these criminal elements who use Sadr City as a planning and staging area. Now, these criminals intimidated and they extorted the population of Sadr City. We developed a plan to isolate and target these criminals over time, eventually planning at some point to enter into the area we currently operate in, which is called Area Gold, and that's south of Quds Street, the southernmost one-third of Sadr City.

Now, we were well on our way with this isolation and targeting plan when the special group criminals made a big mistake. They initiated a campaign of violence through the use of rockets, primarily fired from Sadr City targeting the people of Baghdad. Now, these actions set the conditions for us to accelerate our plan.

We entered Area Gold essentially, like I said, the southern third of Sadr City, with our Iraqi security force partners in the lead, with the idea we were going to deny these criminals the ability to continue to use these

rockets and fire from the area which previously they were occupying. Now, by using our reconnaissance assets, precision-guided munitions, attack helicopter teams and establishing a concrete barrier wall along Quds Street, we were able to contain the violence, defeat the criminal elements and establish a safe neighborhood to protect the citizens of Sadr City.

Now, in this process, we destroyed 61 rocket and mortar teams, killed 163 special group criminals, and our success against these teams could not have been accomplished without the bravery, the patience and professionalism, and concern for collateral damage that was demonstrated by our attack helicopter pilots.

Now, let me give you an example of what I mean by that. Following a rocket launch from a position in Sadr City, one of our air weapons teams -- that's two Apaches -- responded to the launch site at about 5:30 p.m. one evening. They stayed on station, rotating other teams out for five hours. Keeping an eye on these rocket rails, because they'd fired, and then they moved on, knowing that they'd come back to get them, because the precious commodity was more the rails than it was the rockets. Now, after five hours, three enemy personnel returned to retrieve the launchers. Our air weapons team engaged them with one Hellfire missile, killed two of the enemy, destroyed the launch system and destroyed the second rocket that they had erected and were preparing to fire. Remarkable work by a patient, very patient professional team of Army air team.

Now, Iraqi security forces exploited this initial success in Area Gold by moving further north into Sadr City, extending their search for criminals and weapons caches. Since May 20th, the Iraqi army has recovered 83 caches, including 175 IEDs, 76 EFPs, numerous RPGs, rifles, over 320 mortar rounds -- you know, incredible work.

Now, in Area Gold, with improved security and coordination with the government of Iraq, we are improving the quality of life for the residents of Sadr City. Now, this includes removing the trash and rubble, humanitarian and medical assistance, installation of street lights, sewer/water, electrical repairs, and refurbishing the important Jamila market there in Sadr City.

Now, partnering with their national/local government authorities, we established a civil-military operations center in Sadr City to help the people, to receive claims and to coordinate humanitarian aid and military-civilian efforts. To date, there have been over 1,000 residents of Sadr City that have walked in, filed claims, and many of those we've paid out, totaling to date over \$70,000. Now, currently there are nine funded projects, totaling over \$1.1 million, and 23 microgrants paid out, totaling over \$57,000. And there's a lot of work -- still more to do, and it's really exciting.

To this end, I assigned the civil-military operations mission in Sadr City to what I call Task Force Gold -- and this is interesting, because it's led by a brigadier general named Jeff Talley. He's the commander of the 926th Engineer Brigade, a U.S. Army Reserve unit, and he comes to us out of Montgomery, Alabama. They just got here.

Now, Jeff's story's important to tell, because I think it well describes the integration of active and Reserve components and highlights the sacrifices our country has made in this endeavor. Jeff is not only a general officer in the Army Reserve. He's a highly respected and distinguished professor of engineering at the University of Notre Dame. To that end, I must thank the Fighting Irish for lending us Jeff, because he's carrying a great success story; he's developing the right conditions there in Sadr City.

Now, our operations against these criminals extend well outside Sadr City as well, to all of Baghdad. We're pursuing the enemy, and we're searching for weapons caches across Baghdad, focusing in known support areas. I remind my soldiers we attack, attack, attack, across all lines of operation.

Now, the areas -- we're focusing outside of Sadr City on both the east and west side of the Tigris River, which -- as you're aware, it bisects Baghdad. Now we're going to continue to hunt these criminals, to locate and destroy their weapons storage areas, through targeted intelligence-driven raids.

Now, what's interesting is many of the leaders of these criminal elements have fled. They left. Our message to those enemy leaders who have left: Don't come back. To the few who remain, it's going to be all about attack, attack, attack. Leave or be captured or killed.

The conditions in Baghdad are changing. There's no place for those terrorists and criminals. The people are fed up with them. They're tired of the violence and destruction. They vote to move on.

Now, you soldiers on the street on the street of Baghdad are my top priority. We take proactive measures to improve soldier access to mental health care to prevent suicides and identify early symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

In MND-B, we instituted a suicide elimination policy consisting of command emphasis, leader and soldier training, commanders de-stigmatizing those seeking care, and really unit leadership, behavior health care training.

Now, perhaps the most important -- we push our mental health cares and our chaplains forward to where the soldiers are living, and I force them to visit our combat outposts, be with our soldiers in our joint security stations, and listen.

We feel all this is making a difference as well in a 35 percent reduction in our medical evacuation to the United States for mental health reasons. While our suicide -- while any suicide is one too many, our suicide rate right now is below the 2007 Army in-theater average.

Now, you must -- I'm most thankful -- we're most thankful of support we receive from families throughout all the United States and Germany. Many special people contribute in tremendous ways. For example, you know, most of you all know Nolan Ryan as a Hall of Fame pitcher. In that, we know him as well. However, we know Mr. Ryan as a friend. On two separate occasions, he has hosted the families of the 4th Infantry Division to Texas baseball games, the Round Rock Express and the Texas Rangers. Mr. Ryan understands the sacrifices of soldiers and their families, and he's gone far and long and hard to make life a little bit better for our families back home. And to that end, we thank him.

Now back to Iraq:

Now, as you know, in our -- in addition to our protecting the population, our priority tasks are to build Iraqi security force capacity and capability. I'm very satisfied in reporting to you that we're making significant progress. Through our partnership with two national police and three Iraqi divisions, which consist of 20 brigades and 76 battalions, totaling 49,000 soldiers, we have seen substantial progress.

A significant part of this can be attributed to our nation's investment in the military transition teams, of which -- we have over 1,200 individuals serving on 82 teams here in Baghdad. The soldiers on these teams are full-time advisers to the Iraqi forces, spending countless hours advising, coaching, assisting and developing our Iraqi teammates.

Now, I'll use the story of one of our heroes to illustrate both the success and the sacrifice inherent in the MiTT mission.

During our initial operation in Sadr City in Area Gold, arguably one of the most important jobs was held by a Major Mark Rosenberg, United States Army. He was the MiTT adviser to the battalion commander of the lead Iraqi battalion going into Sadr City.

Now, I personally went to see and visit and spoke with Mark on the 7th of April at the height of fighting. And I reminded him that he had the most important job at the most important time in the most important place in Baghdad, Sadr City.

Sadly Mark was killed the next day doing his job. Mark was from Miami Lakes, Florida. He was 32 years old. He was a man, a soldier, a father of two young boys aged 2 and 4, a husband, a volunteer.

Mark was an American soldier who just happened to be Jewish, serving proudly advising Muslim soldiers in a Muslim land; a soldier who volunteered for the toughest job in Iraq.

Mark is why that battalion succeeded in Sadr City. He mentored and coached this battalion commander. When the battalion was tired, and the commander was getting a little concerned, getting a little unsteady, Mark kept him going. Frankly we're where we're at today in Sadr City because this guy, Mark Rosenberg, led from the front.

Now, while we expanded the capability of the Iraqi army and national police, we've grown the size of the station and patrol police in Baghdad; focusing on recruiting, training and facilities.

Now, in partnership with our Iraqi counterparts, we've hired and trained over 8,500 new police. It's important to note though that 3,250 of those recruits are former Sons of Iraq.

So we're really aggressively pushing to get our Sons of Iraq, a little over 30,000, transitioned to other employment, much of that with the Iraqi army, the national police or the Iraqi police.

Now, right now we have over 22,000 Iraqi police in Baghdad. And we're rapidly approaching our end goal of 25,000, which is at the end of what we call phase one expansion.

Phase two's expansion is going to take us up to 35,200 police in Baghdad. And I hope to get there no later than February '09. This expansion sets the conditions for the future of Baghdad under civil control with police providing the necessary security throughout the city. So what's next? I've got to tell you, I'm optimistic about the future of Baghdad. But there's still a heck of a lot of work to be done. We will build on our success in specific areas.

First, our mission of protecting the population: That will not change. Security is our number-one task. And in partnership with the Iraqi security forces, we will continue to pursue those who operate outside the rule of law.

We will continue to expand our ability to be among the people of Baghdad. We're going to follow the COIN strategy that we've grown into. And as it is today, we currently have 51 joint security stations, 23 combat outposts.

That's a significant increase. And we plan to increase this total number by probably 15 percent over the next six months. It's critical that we not spend our time in the FOBs, the conventional FOBs; that we get out with the people where we need to be.

Now, improved security conditions allow us to improve in other important areas of employment, essential service and local governance. Increased employment in Baghdad is of particular importance to us.

Our employment expansion plan analysis right now tells us that there's a near-term potential -- probably more mid-term potential for over 160,000 jobs in Baghdad.

Now, employment's increased by over 60,000 as a result of our combined efforts. We project a further increase by 20,000 more here in short order. Now, contributing to this increase are programs such as the Sons and Daughters of Iraq; microgrants and microloans that are stimulating the local economy; recruitment in the Iraqi security forces, vo-tech, state-owned enterprise -- enterprise revitalization, and some good private-sector investments.

Now, the Iraqi government is also increasing its commitment -- this is important. They're putting their mark on the wall in working together to improve the quality of life for citizens in Baghdad. The government's committed \$63 million in Iraqi Commanders Emergency Response program to be used on projects in Baghdad such as school renovations, water purification plants, health clinics and road repairs. We're integrating these projects into our efforts, our joint efforts with our Iraqi partners to rebuild Baghdad.

Now, in closing, listen, there's going to be challenges ahead. What's most important that you know is we understand our mission, and our soldiers -- your soldiers, in partnership with the Iraqi security forces and the citizens of Baghdad, are making a difference. Our families support us back home, and we're supported by an Army and local communities that care. We're a team. We're making progress. It's steady, boy, steady. One step at a time. However, we remain steadfast and loyal and we're focused.

Thank you for your attention to my opening comments, and I'll now take your questions.

MODERATOR: Okay. Appreciate that, sir.

Let's go ahead and get started. And please, I remind you that he doesn't know who you are, so please identify yourself and your news agency. Tom, go ahead.

Q General, it's Tom Bowman with NPR. You mentioned that there are a thousand filed claims in Sadr City. You paid out about 70,000. Can you give us a breakdown on those claims; how many for property damage, how many for injured or killed civilians? GEN. HAMMOND: Tom, I can't give you a specific -- I don't have the numbers in front of me. But I'd probably guess and say probably 85 percent is for property damage, much of that property damage coming at the hands of indirect fire that was shot from Sadr City. Much of that fell short. We had a few mortar rounds that fell short in Jamila market, which I think you know is the critical market that provides much to the rest of Baghdad, and about 25 percent to one-third burned down as a result of short rounds. But probably 85 percent is paid out for property damage as a result of that, and just the direct combat fighting.

I think as you know, that our soldiers are very careful in the way that we maneuver and place precise fire on targets. I would tell you quite clearly -- having been up there quite a bit -- that the folks that we're fighting against, these criminals, they didn't care much about collateral damage. But it's our responsibility -- we assume the responsibility for the ground we occupy with our partners, Iraqi security forces, and we work together in the CMOG in dealing with the people as they come in.

It's very encouraging when a thousand people step forward. In the past they wouldn't have done that, out of the fear of the militias. They wouldn't have stepped forward. But they came forward seeking the assistance, and we well support them.

Q Fifteen percent would be injured or killed civilians?

Is that right? So you're talking dozens, at least, of injured or killed civilians, correct?

GEN. HAMMOND: I would say -- just an estimate -- probably about 15 percent of the citizens that I'm aware of could've -- injured. Injured or killed. I'm not -- I can't get precise there, but I will give you a more precise answer if you stay in touch with me. I'll help you out on that.

Q (Off mike) -- when you talk about mortars and rockets falling short and creating damage -- I mean, clearly, if you're paying out compensation claims, it's your rockets, the MLRS, it's the Predators dropping Hellfire missiles and it's the tank rounds that are also causing damage. Isn't that right?

GEN. HAMMOND: Well, no. No and yes. Let me -- let me be more precise. No MLRS rockets have been fired anywhere near Sadr City. It was a limited number of rockets on a precision strike against a series of high-value targets. And I can tell you that the collateral damage from that was very, very limited, and I know that because I got in a helicopter; I flew right over the site and sat on top of it and looked at it personally and examined it.

As far as any short rounds, as I describe them, from mortars or rockets, we didn't fire any mortars or rockets anywhere into Sadr City. It was the militia that were firing these from different ranges within Sadr City off of sort of rigged-up rails that might or might not be accurate, and quite often -- not quite often, but at times -- would create conditions where a short round, in fact, would fall on the innocent people. So they not only -- they made a point of not only embarking -- terror at the range they were trying to shoot the rocket but also at short range where they made the mistakes, definitely.

As far as any tank rounds that we shot which -- we did fire some well-placed tank rounds in very limited numbers when it was necessary to defeat a threat that was being imposed upon the people or our soldiers, but we are very -- we've been very specific and careful in how we have fought up there. I've been very proud of our soldiers, the fact that we haven't made many mistakes because of the concern for the number one mission we had. The number one mission was not to defeat the militia; it was to protect the people, to protect the people.

Q Right, but you -- if you -- just one last thing. If you've been so careful, why do you have the thousand claims against you?

GEN. HAMMOND: Well, a lot of people came out of the -- because these people had a legitimate claim, they felt, that they wanted to process. A lot of these -- that sort of gives you some sort of indication, I think, for the amount of indiscriminate damage that was imposed upon the innocent people by a relentless, unforgiving -- lack of conscience -- enemy.

MODERATOR: Go ahead.

Q Hi, General. This is Courtney Kube from NBC News.

You mentioned that many criminals have fled to Iran in recent days. Can you give us a little better sense of how many that is, a rough idea, and if there's any stepped-up operations along the border to intercept them before they leave Iraq?

GEN. HAMMOND: Well, I think -- what I best would tell you is that probably -- oh, I would say those that previously were inside Sadr City, were inside Baghdad, probably about 95 percent of them have departed.

How many of those are outside the confines of Iraq itself and have gone on to other places? Quite a few, but I'd really rather not get into specific numbers.

Q So if they're leaving Sadr City and they're dispersing -- the majority are dispersing within Iraq, then, as opposed to going into Iran? Is that what you're saying?

GEN. HAMMOND: Quite a bit of them. Most of them, I think have -- let me parse it. Most of them -- 90 percent have left. Those that remain have gone to ground. We continue to work our intelligence to locate them. We continue to apply pressure in attack, attack, attack mode. Those that have left -- those that could, I think, departed the country. Others have gone -- other locations throughout Baghdad, and they continue to be pursued relentlessly by our forces, really led by the efforts of the Iraqi army.

Q If I could ask one more quick question, General, you had a soldier killed by an explosively formed projectile yesterday in Baghdad. Are you seeing any kind of increase recently in these -- we have seen more press releases that mention EFP finds, but have you seen any increase in the number of attacks by EFPs in your AO?

GEN. HAMMOND: I've seen a decrease in the number of EFP attacks. As you see, we've seen a corresponding increase in the number of cache finds, not only in Sadr City but throughout all of Baghdad. I've seen a corresponding decrease in the number of IEDs, specifically the EFP attacks. We've had fewer and fewer EFP attacks over probably the last three weeks. We did have two attacks yesterday. You are correct that one of them did kill one of our soldiers. The first time I've seen two EFP attacks in one day in probably two weeks.

MODERATOR: Luis?

Q General, it's Luis Martinez at ABC News. If I can go back to the claims question, it sounds like you're paying out money for damage that was caused mostly by the insurgents rather than by your forces. Is that accurate, and how typical is that?

GEN. HAMMOND: Well, I think, foremost, the whole claims process is designed to benefit the people of Iraq. Typically, the program was designed to provide compensation for situations that we are responsible for. In the case of what we got in Sadr City, there are certain claims that are paid for situations that we accept full responsibilities for, and there are others that are paid for conditions that were clearly created by the efforts of the insurgents, if you would. Despite that fact, the whole program was designed to compensate the needs of the people at a time when they need it most.

Q General, it's David Morgan from Reuters. In terms of the cease-fire agreement that brought the recent spate of violence in Sadr City to an end, can you tell us, to your knowledge, did Iran play a role in restraining the special groups that were involved in the attacks?

And to what extent did their influence bring an end to the violence?

GEN. HAMMOND: Well, I don't know. I think that, you know, any time -- we've seen the past the Muqtada al-Sadr's declaration of cease-fire have impact. In the particular case this time around, what we dealt with, I think there were really two groups. There were those that chose to honor the desire to decrease, to eliminate the violence, and there are those that chose otherwise. And the ones that otherwise -- the ones I'm talking about, all you can really label them as is criminals. You know, there's either those that follow the law or those that wish to break the law.

And we're at that point now where I think the real influence in all this, in my opinion, is the people. I think we're seeing -- and I've been here before in Baghdad, in MND-Baghdad, in a different role. I've seen a significant difference now, where more and more I'm seeing the people, the people are stepping forward, and the number of tips we're receiving now, it's unbelievable. They're stepping forward. They're sharing information. They're telling us in Sadr City, in Area Gold, they're very thankful to the Iraqi army. They don't want the Iraqi army to leave. They're thankful that the militias have backed away. These people want to get on with life. It's really a remarkable situation to see as it's developed here in the last -- really last month. Very positive. Very positive what I see out there ahead.

Q A follow-up. Is the departure of these criminal leaders, as you say -- is that part of the cease-fire agreement, to get them out of Sadr City, to eliminate them as an influence?

GEN. HAMMOND: No, I just think they ran. I think they were afraid that they were going to get detained or killed.

MODERATOR: AI?

Q General, early in your statement you said there's no turning of a corner yet. But it does seem from a distance that fundamentally the situation has changed. There's coverage in the weekend papers here of progress in the north, in Baghdad and in the south. Do you see a fundamental change? To what do you attribute it? How much of it depends on the decisions of Muqtada al-Sadr?

GEN. HAMMOND: Well, you know, at the tactical level where I'm at, I control what I can control here in Baghdad. And I'll tell you, the situation I see ourselves in here right now, it's encouraging. You know, I'm not one who likes to talk about turning corners or dance-in-the-end-zone sort of approach to any of this, because I don't see it in that terms. This is a "one day at a time" sort of operation. Each minute counts. We're just getting it done. We're doing our job. We're sent here to protect the people of Baghdad.

What I would tell you is it's very encouraging the effort -- the combined effort of the Iraqi security forces and your soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines here collectively as we're working towards this. It's encouraging. It's positive. But, you know, we take it one day at a time. Sometimes, you know, here in Iraq, with my experience, sometimes things aren't what they might necessarily seem. As far as I'm concerned, that just means we work harder and harder.

So again, I would characterize this as very encouraging. We got a mission that has yet to be accomplished, but we're continuing to move out one step at a time; we're protecting the people.

Q If I could follow up, General, let's say about two years ago, there was a lot of talk about the numbers of the Iraqi security forces -- how many were trained, how many were equipped, how many were in the lead -- and now, really, in the last couple of months, we seem to be seeing that critical mass and some of the experience that they've gotten having an impact. Would you say that -- I mean, how big a factor would you say that is? And although we keep hearing that the gains are reversible, is that part reversible?

GEN. HAMMOND: I don't think the gains the Iraqi security forces have made over time are reversible, because I see an enormous growth in their ability to command and control -- plain and simple leadership. Second, I see a greater willingness -- I'll call follower-ship -- of the soldiers that I spend much time with out there who are doing their job.

I see is an Iraqi army, a national police that has grown in confidence here in a big way. They're better equipped. They're better trained. They're more experienced. And their leaders are doing a much better job in planning and in execution. I think that this thing is -- it's headed in the right direction.

Heck, you know, let's be frank with ourselves. Right now, the forces north in Sadr City, it's Iraqi security forces. They're National Police and Iraqi army. They're the ones that have taken this fight and moved it forward. They're doing a remarkable job. They're the one that have -- the ones that have found the significant number of caches that I mentioned in my opening statement.

I spend probably at least one-half of each week with the Iraqi army, with my equivalent leadership, down on the line with the soldiers, observing, coaching, mentoring. And I'm finding more and more I'm not able to give as much advice as I gave in the past because they're picking it up and they're executing. And they're executing it to standard.

So I would say that definitely the progress -- the Iraqi security forces' condition, where the glass is half-full -- they still have a ways to go, but we're getting there and we're moving there one step at a time. MODERATOR: Jeff.

Q General, Jeff Schogol with Stars and Stripes. You said the number of EFP attacks has decreased recently. Do you have any numbers about how many they were and what they are now?

GEN. HAMMOND: I don't have those numbers in front of me, but I'll send that to you in an e-mail if you'd like.

Q Can you talk about how much of Baghdad is in the "control" phase, how much is in "retain" and how much is in "disruption"?

GEN. HAMMOND: I'd rather talk in a little bit different terms, if it's okay, because too often we get confused with control, retain. I think I could probably characterize Baghdad best something like this: Iraqi security forces have complete freedom of movement. They're enforcing the rule of law. They go where they want to go, on their terms. They do whatever is necessary to ensure that the law stands.

You still have individuals and some groups out there that choose to be non-law-abiding citizens, and that's being dealt with. Each day, I think, it gets a little bit better. One of the good indicators is the willingness of the people to share information, step forward, provide tips, talk and provide the information that's necessary. It's very encouraging, I think. What we have right now is a great situation with respect to the effort that's being applied by the security forces and the fact that they believe in what they're doing, they believe in themselves.

MODERATOR: Okay, we can do one more. We'll do two -- are they short, gentlemen? All right, we'll do Luis first, and then we'll go back to David.

Q General, its Luis Martinez again. Can I ask you about the Sadrists? Are you seeing a pushback from larger groups who are going against Sadr's wishes, maybe thinking that he's being soft on the U.S. by continuing with the cease-fire? Are you seeing larger numbers who are rejecting his pleas for a cease-fire and moving towards violence?

GEN. HAMMOND: No, I don't think so. To be honest with you, I don't think so.

MODERATOR: David?

Q General, it's David Morgan at Reuters again.

Earlier in your presentation, you talked about moving to phase two in terms of security, with civilian control and police providing security in Baghdad. Can you tell us how close you think you are to that change? And once that change occurs, how long will it be before there is civilian control in Baghdad?

GEN. HAMMOND: Well, you know, that's a good question. At some point, Baghdad will be -- in the future, day yet to be determined, Baghdad will be under provincial control and the security apparatus will in fact be the police. And that's a government decision. I contribute to that by assisting in the development of not only the Iraqi security forces, but what I'll call them is the Iraqi police. And we've developed two different phases in the development of the police capacity. One phase -- we're almost there, about 25,000 police.

The second phase we've developed, where we have further identified the additional needs that we have to meet the requirement, the police force requirement throughout Baghdad, and in particular the officer requirements. So our phase two is the additional plus the necessary officers, which I -- personally, I predict that somewhere by February '09, I hope that we will have -- we'll have the right number of both officers and station patrol police, still developing in a training capacity. And at that point on, I think we then got to probably continue to put a little bit more effort into it to meet some expectation when we really believe that the police can step up and assume their rightful role in providing the security for the people here throughout the city.

MODERATOR: Thank you, sir. We are at the end of our time. We appreciate your --

GEN. HAMMOND: You cut me off. You're tired of me, huh?

MODERATOR: I'm sorry.

GEN. HAMMOND: Okay, no, I'm sorry. Listen, one final comment.

Thanks for your time. The only thing I'd ask -- the message I'd ask you to take back is something like this. These youngsters you have here, soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, they're your credentials.

They're the nation's credentials. They're less than 1 percent of the nation who volunteer to serve here. And they want -- they want this mission. They're doing one heck of a job. I think I'd ask you, as you go forth, to find an Army, Navy, Marine or Air Force family member somewhere, in a local mall, wherever you go about places, and thank them. Because those folks have lent -- they've lent to us their service member here to fight this battle for freedom and for the needs of these Iraqi people. And their service member's doing one heck of a job.

I think the glass is half-full. I think clearly that it's an encouraging situation we have right now. But we still got a lot of work we got to get done. And we're up for it, we're up to it, and I'm looking forward to tomorrow.

I have nothing further. Thanks for your time.

MODERATOR: Okay, sir. We appreciate that. And we hope to hear from you again down the road and you can fill us in on the progress you're making. It's been very beneficial. Thank you, sir.

GEN. HAMMOND: Thank you.

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