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Presenter: Former Commanding General, Task Force 134, Multinational Force Iraq, Maj. Gen. Douglas Stone

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DoD News Briefing with Maj. Gen. Stone From the Pentagon

BRYAN WHITMAN (deputy assistant secretary of Defense, Public Affairs): Good afternoon and welcome. And allow me to give a brief introduction to our briefer today.

It is my privilege to be able to introduce Major General Douglas Stone, who until just a couple of days ago was the commanding general of Task Force 134, the unit that's responsible for Detainee Operations in Iraq. And he just completed 14 months of doing that and has been kind enough to come back here and give us some of his thoughts and answer some of your questions about what he's been doing for the past 14 months.

And it really is our privilege to have you back here. And we thank you for taking the time to join us today.

GEN. STONE: Well, good afternoon. Or yes, good afternoon. Thank you, Mr. Whitman, for the introduction. It is good to be back.

Having just turned over the command of Task Force 134, I'd like to begin today with a brief review of what was achieved during those 14 months that I served as the deputy commanding general for Detainee Operations of Multinational Force Iraq. I'd then look forward to answering any questions that you might have.

One of the most important lessons, that we've learned from Abu Ghraib, was the need to extend first rate care and custody to every segment of the detainee population.

You know, in the past, we have failed to prioritize this duty at our own peril. But by not emphasizing population protection and the exemplary treatment of detainees, our facilities became breeding grounds for extremist recruitment.

As a result, we've changed many of the practices.

First, we have made respect for the individual detainee the foundation of everything that we do. We must never forget that the physical well-being of detainees is our primary responsibility. And their security is of vital importance to our mission. Now, while the purpose of coalition detainee operations has always been to provide security to the population outside detention, we now apply this very same approach inside our facilities. And to this end, we now assess all detainees to identify and isolate the extremist threats. This creates an environment conducive to engagement by enabling the more moderate detainees to live free from fear and intimidation.

Our ability to detect and to segregate enduring security threats has served to dramatically reduce violence inside the coalition detention, and it has opened pathways to engagement with our more moderate population. Here, detainee assessments have been invaluable. They show that many of the detainees gravitated towards the insurgency because they were underemployed, undereducated and they needed some supplemental source of income.

To address these societal programs (sic) and to promote good citizenship, detainees are now offered an array of voluntary programs to help serve as a deterrent to insurgent activity. These efforts include education, vocational training, civics, Islamic discussion, family visitation, pay-for-work programs that actually empower the more moderate detainees and they ultimately marginalize the violent extremists. Among the most important skills, however, is simply the ability to read and write. And the aim of such programs has been to peacefully reintegrate moderates back into the Iraqi society and to encourage them to become willing and active partners in Iraq's reconciliation and reconstruction.

In the months following the surge in operations last summer, the detainee population in Iraq rose from approximately 14,000 to a peak of nearly 26,000. Over the last few months, however, that trend has been reversed.

And when I left Iraq on Friday, the detainee population was under 21,000 and continuing to drop.

Perhaps most important, however, is the fact that Multinational Force Iraq's minuscule reinterment rate demonstrates that the right people are being released. Since the detainee engagement programs began in earnest in late September, now more than 10,000 detainees have been released. And to this point, fewer than 40 have been returned to coalition force custody.

Lastly, I'd like to emphasize that over the last year, we have made transparency a key principle of coalition detention, to allay a myriad of concerns and to show that we have nothing to hide. We have continued to open our facilities to a number of agencies. The International Committee of the Red Cross and the Iraqi Ministry of Human Rights have both inspected the coalition force detention facilities and met with -- privately -- the detainees to discuss the conditions of their detention.

We increasingly opened our gates to the international media, not only to Western newspapers, television and radio, but to Iraqi and pan-Arab news networks. We want people, especially the Iraqis, to see and understand what really does go on inside of detention.

But most significantly for the detainee engagement efforts, we have improved access to those most affected by the coalition's detention, and that is the families of the detainees themselves. So far this year, nearly 50,000 family visits have been facilitated at coalition detention facilities. And I would fully expect that by the end of the year, that number should exceed 100,000.

Of the most important lessons that I have taken from my time in command of detainee operations is the point that no matter how much we revolutionize the conduct of the function, at the end of the day, detention is still detention. And we cannot escape or hide from the fact that it is real -- it is the reality of warfighting. Nevertheless, I believe we are performing a critical task that is in both the U.S. and the Iraqi interest. By taking dangerous individuals off the Iraqi streets, we have helped to create a secure environment for the law-abiding citizens that remain. And this tends to promote stability, enable political reconciliation and encourage economic growth.

I want to close by saying that before leaving Baghdad on Friday, I turned over command to the capable and willing hands of Rear Admiral Garland Wright. And I have great confidence in him and respect for Admiral Wright, and I wish him the very greatest of success during his time and tour as the commander of Task Force 134.

And with that, I would look forward to any questions you might have on this topic.

Yes, sir?

Q General, how many detainees does the coalition ultimately intend to release? And when do you expect that to be finished?

GEN. STONE: The determination of releases are actually very straightforward. It is when those who are -- have judged that they are an imperative security risk believe they are no longer an imperative security risk. And that's why you see detainee releases coming down now, because there's a much more personal and engaged involvement by the corps members and others in discussions with the detainees themselves to try to articulate clearly what happened, what was going on, what are the motivations. There's a lot of input that I could talk about later.

But I would think over time all the detainees will be -- are today candidates for release. Some of them have criminal activities. Those get processed through the Iraqi court system, and I could talk about that later if you like. But for those that ultimately remain, there will be a number, and it will be more than a thousand and it will be a tough question. For the Iraqis, do they want to assume responsibility for them, knowing that the situation under which we have them is what we have; they were an imperative security risk; in our judgment now they should not be released? But ultimately the Iraqis will be making that decision. These are Iraqi citizens. We fully expect in our thinking that it will transfer over.

Now, the timing on that will be dependent in large part on what the agreement is between the government of Iraq and the government of the United States. And I can't speak to that. As you know, that's in negotiation now. Detention will certainly be one of many things that will be talked about.

But we are planning in our activities to bring in the Iraqis in a very large way. I have two academies that pump out thousands of Iraqi correction officers who are now standing guard with the U.S., hundreds of teachers -- Iraqi teachers working with the detainees, hundreds of the imams are involved with their instruction. I can't tell you the exact number, but it's a big number of counselors and others.

So, increasingly the Iraqis are involved with this. We're now working through a process where -- feeling comfortable with our Multinational Force's review board. We are hopeful that Iraqis will join those boards and be involved with the fundamental decision: Is this individual an imperative security risk? Because it's a very straightforward process and often gets very confused.

You know, I do these kinds of conferences with the Iraqis all the time, and the Iraqi press corps has become pretty sophisticated. The words in Arabic still sort of say a different thing.

You used the term initially "prison." I don't use the term "prison." I use "detention facility," because a prisoner is somebody who has been incarcerated, arrested -- our guys aren't -- who have been taken on a specific charge with evidence before a court and then tried, found guilty and given a sentence for either rehabilitation or retribution in a prison. That process is not the process we run. Our process is a warfighting process where a judgment is made that an individual is an imperative security risk. That individual has been taken off the battlefield as a civilian internee, held until such time as the judgment is made that they're no longer an imperative security risk, and then released back into the population.

So they're two very different processes. They do overlap on occasion, in that about -- I'm giving you a rough number -- about 10 percent of those that are brought in have historically had genuine criminal evidence that the Iraqis felt comfortable that if we packaged this evidence to them or -- packaged -- I mean, gathered it and brought it all together, that the judicial investigator -- they have a different process than U.S. law -- judicial investigator would take it, build a case around it and then recommend it to go forward. And I can't give you the number, but it's a couple thousand that have gone -- those cases, and our conviction rate's in about the high 60 percent.

So a long-winded answer to your question. The answer is, we would ultimately see all but a number flowing themselves back into the society. We would ultimately see the Iraqis playing a huge role in terms of that process, both in terms of the upfront decision and also in terms of the release. But all of this will sort of continue to flow, as it has over my 14 months. I mean, you know, we've made big changes that have sort of migrated from a counterinsurgency standpoint to bring the populations more closely together.

Q You said that number was close to 1,000, or --

GEN. STONE: You know, I look at these cases and the situations -- I feel comfortable that we're getting the

guys that have hard-core criminal evidence with the Iraqis over and out. The ones that remain are ones that we might have intelligence on that we are not disclosing that are -- clearly the conditions under which they were taken do not substantiate our view today that they should be released. And that's not just the warfighters' review; I mean, they're dealing with the local community and the leadership and the folks that are on the ground -- in their judgment as well, not the right time to release the guy.

But I can't imagine how the number, you know, of very, very concerning guys would be monumentally big. It's certainly not the number we're at now. So it's going to be smaller. But I oftentimes use that number just because, you know, it's plus or minus some. I don't really know.

Let me just put it in a different context. There's a definition of imperative security risk for an Iraqi community that is actually different than an imperative security risk for a coalition force member when they're on the ground. That's intuitively obvious, I'm sure.

So we're concerned, as everybody would hope that we would be, of those that are -- for both populations. But if we're not in a ground, or it's been turned over and it's -- Iraqis have got it, it might well be that this individual in their community, in their tribe would not represent a security risk. So it's going to be judgmental as we go forward.

But there will be a number. I'm very confident. And I'm very confident that number will be small, but there will come a time when the U.S. just -- you know, the guys on the ground are going to try everything they can to convince the Iraqis it's not a good idea to let these guys out.

Q General, you talked about providing \$200 per months for the first six months for the detainees being released, because there are no jobs out there for them once they get out.

Is that program starting? Can you give us a sense of how it's going?

GEN. STONE: Yeah, thank you. And some who have visited with us know our process sort of starts with trying to meet the problem as far out before the detainee comes into the system and then a very elaborate series of steps while they're in to assess and reengage them and engage them where those issues are. And then ultimately, in the step that's being commented on, what we want to do is release a detainee on a guarantor (sic) that they would come back every month in return for a stipend and that they would perform a service in so doing. That service that we envision right now would be that they would take the civics course that we have and teach that outside.

So our idea is to combine that with the ministers of -- the various agencies inside Iraq, to help them place into education systems, if that's where they're going, jobs, et cetera. So we have a lot of things that are coming together.

At the time I left, the actual monetary payment -- not the people. We got that set up, the facility -- (inaudible) -- the gate to come in -- all that's been put together. The actual legal review of how these funds can be used was just in the final throes. So I was disappointed, frankly, to leave that. That was on my checklist, one of the last two or three things I didn't get done.

But I think there's some strong concurrence that that's a good direction to go. It will make a big difference, I believe, in terms of the detainees' willingness to work with the coalition forces as opposed to fight them. And it's very important. I mean, the Iraqi employment deficit's very real. And in particular areas, it affects the detainees willingness to fight, in a very real and tangible manner, as I think we talked before.

Yes, sir.

Q Could you talk to us a bit about underaged detainees and how many -- how many you have right now and what policy change you're looking at to --

GEN. STONE: Yeah, the --

Q -- the initial -- yeah, the --

GEN. STONE: The underaged issue is not vexing. It is to some, but when you're on the ground, it's actually a lot clearer. When I got there, during the course of the surge, et cetera, our numbers shot up to above a thousand. And the complexity of the problem was that they were being kept separately but still in the same FOB proper as the adults.

And in this community, the ability to communicate, to threaten, to intimidate, even though you're not physically there but you can reach out with your voice or your eyes and your hand signals, can really change somebody's behavior.

Almost all of those youth were recruited by al Qaeda. There are some exceptions. But in principle and as you probably know, I do the interrogations as well, that is the conclusion that we've come to now.

We've brought that number down through working with the youth, because they go -- we created an entire new day school for them. Separate teachers; classroom sizes are quite small; counseling programs.

Many are mentally impaired. And so there's medical, you know, aspects to their lives. There are some who are vicious.

And the age issue is vexing. That one I will tell you because in most cases, they don't know their age. They don't know when they were born. And they don't know how old they are. And there's no real, clear way to go up and test somebody; to say, well, this kid's 16 or 17 or, you know, a certain age.

So we work through that process, as do the Iraqis. And then some subset get transferred to the Iraqi juvenile facility, where they engage with them. Many, a recently large number, actually go before the Iraqi court system and are then tried and go into juvenile prisons. So there's that number.

When I left Iraq, the number was below 500. And I can't tell you. We could probably go find it, but it was cruising its way down to, the first number was going to be a 3.

The al Qaeda recruiting had changed in the course of the last couple months. What was more direct recruiting before has now gone around the system. And they're recruiting from orphanages to bring the youth in.

They do various kinds of activities, you know, and I could walk the dog for you on them. They are less -- the youth are less specific in the kinds of things that they do. They sort of experiment with being a part of an assassination overwatch team or laying an IED or filming something. Or there's a long list of those kinds of things.

All of these youth by the time they get to us have, you know, they've been involved with the situation that is counter-coalition.

I'm very comfortable in that conclusion.

But again, their motivations are really quite different. They're actually very different than the average male detainee, who is 29; 60, 70 percent married. Of those married, you know, 25 percent of them have five kids. This is -- these are different. But we do have a surprising number of 13-, 14-, 15-year-olds who are married and have children.

So it's not, you know, an easy answer to weed it out, except that I go out or did go out and see the youth almost every week and go into the classrooms, and those who have visited walk in and see them. They are engaged in this process. We have an increasing number of parents who ask to not have them released -- in many cases, have the siblings brought in, because it's a secured place.

Their education system is exactly the Iraqis' -- we now -- they are getting the Iraqi education system, and they are going through their degree program.

But the answer to your question about where it's all going is, as long as al Qaeda recruits them to do these things, or other organizations -- al Qaeda's really the predominant recruiter of youth -- they're going to have to be

detained, and they'll have to be taken off.

Now often people say: Well, geez, now why don't we just take them back to their parents?

Well, I don't want to surprise you, but they don't have those -- they may have a family structure that's there. They might have a family member. There might be somebody who will come pick them up. But you know, oftentimes they were involved with the exact same activity that their, you know, male -- brother, uncle, cousin was involved in. That detention process brought them into detention at a different facility.

So, it's not a simple answer. I think we are moving the number down. I think we will always have a number. The Iraqis have gone through with the amnesty program and found the vast majority of the ones that they have to be -- where that charge -- even though they might have been guilty of the charge -- that law doesn't apply to them and it's been thrown out.

Where that applies to the youth that we have, we have also honored that, and they have been set free as well. And of course you probably know we don't hold a detainee youth longer than 365 days. They are let go oftentimes when they don't want to be let go. You know, it's sort of a sad situation to watch.

But the reality is, this is a tough one.

I like what we're doing, with the youth, in the programs that we have. They're getting great education. They're getting all of the language skills, English and Arabic. We practice it with them.

They have sports programs. We have soccer leagues, big facilities for them to be in. And in the not-too-distant future, they'll actually be living out there full-time.

Q When you were saying, they were being recruited by al Qaeda, you were talking about outside the prisons, not while they were inside the prisons.

GEN. STONE: That's correct. That's exactly right.

They got to us because they were recruited through an activity. And they'll be in an al Qaeda-led network. I mean, even the al Qaeda concept is a little bit confusing, I think, for those who haven't lived it, you know.

But al Qaeda is an organizational structure that makes things happen. And then down below, subcontracted entities grab a hold. And these are kids that were recruited and sometimes set up to be recruited.

It's also true with women. Women are set up the same way, because the recidivist rate for them is, I mean, they're going to go back. I mean, we've got a number, that were suicide bombers, that we stopped mid-course. And you know, if we don't work with them, they'll most likely go back to that activity.

But all this being said, the -- inside we see no evidence of that happening. It is possible. We would be naive to think it's not a threat. We take it on whenever we see it.

The best way to ensure that a youth is not ideologically corrupted is to physically move them out and then to monitor their programs. And that's why in the course of the coming months, we hope that they will physically move to the facility where the school is at. The teachers have already moved. They live there. So we're going to move them completely out. And that's our plan.

Q Right now they're still in the same facilities as the adults.

GEN. STONE: They're in the same FOB proper but they are not in the same compound. So they are separated now by a substantial amount.

What happens in the youth actually happens in the adults. And that is ultimately because it's a collective

society, ultimately somebody will pop up who has got more of an ideological bent. And they'll try to take control.

When we do that, we pull that youth out and move him aside, as we do with the adults now. So we have sort of counterinsurgency teams, looking at those four or five different specialties, watching the behavior, talking, getting feedback, so that we separate them.

Those that come over to the schools -- school in the morning or for the day -- are those that, you know, are not being threatened or intimidated to not do that. And we have, in the past, had that. We've had days when we couldn't get them -- and it's a voluntary program. We couldn't get them to load the buses despite the fact you could see in their eyes every one of them wanted to go. But somebody was saying, "You do, and this will happen to you and your parents." And so once we find them, we move them out, then it all goes back to normal and they -- (off mike).

Yes, sir.

Q You mentioned openness and transparency and so on, and giving briefings or visits to Iraqi journalists and folks. Have members of Congress come and visited you to see what you're doing? And have they expressed concerns and have their concerns been allayed? Or what have they asked, and what's been the result?

GEN. STONE: Well, we've had -- I can't give you the exact number, but it feels like weekly -- (chuckles) -- hopefully not -- certainly monthly codels coming through. Not as many have flown to Bucca, but some, both on the Senate side as well as the House of Representatives. We've had a lot of staffers. I'm sure somebody could give you the exact numbers, but there are a lot of folks coming through.

My sense in all the visitations is one that kind of often surprises me. It's that they are surprised in their own reaction to what it isn't. I mean, they sort of have this perception, as I was saying here, that it's a jail and it's a prison and that doors slam and you know -- and so to see them in large -- 500, 600 -- compounds, walking around, you know, with soccer fields and volleyballs and, you know, teaching classes or going to schools or, you know, working on -- there's 21 different types of job programs -- or meeting with their families, holding their kids, it catches them off-guard. And when they see it -- they kind of come in with a perception, and then they don't have the perception, then they don't know exactly where to take the next series of questions.

But I think, in principle, most end up at the policy question, you know. The policy that allows for us to hold detainees is different than Gitmo and different than Afghanistan. Those are -- they're even different, you know, law, legal constructs. So ours is exactly what I said. It's a U.N. Security Council resolution giving the authority to the government of Iraq to give us the authority to detain under a situation where they're viewed to be an imperative security risk.

And that's a judgment call. There's clearly evidence, and we work real hard with our legal team to bring them in.

I think the congressional folks, once they sort out, okay, this is not Gitmo, I mean, okay, now -- (inaudible) -- they spend time on that. And then once they get past that, then they start looking at these processes, and then they sort of grapple with, okay, now why do we do this? I mean, what are we detaining for?

And it gives everybody an opportunity to discuss the fact that, you know, young troops -- and my job before going over was to train the Marine units that went in -- young troops when they go in are not going into a condition that is like CSI: "Well, okay, hold it everybody, I've got to put the yellow ribbon out, we've got to investigate this thing and we've got to take these guys and do these interviews." I mean, it's not police work. It's not investigative work.

I mean, they're lucky if they didn't get shot going in, and they most assuredly will be shot at going out. They got IEDs that they got by and missed and ones that they're not going to get back. They barely can get in and get out, and they pull folks out. You know, by their own admission, they'll take often too many or the wrong guys or a different thing because it's confusion, it's the middle of the night. Somebody's hiding; somebody's not. And so it's an imperfect system, but that's combat. I mean, combat's imperfect. It just is what is.

And then they go back and they hold the detainee to try to sort out, you know, okay, now, here's what we were

looking for. And then they do their process of elimination. Ultimately, after 14 days -- and they're not allowed to hold them longer than that. I mean, we inspect this very closely. And once they cross that barrier -- I mean, actually there's a situation now where they can ask for seven additional days, but, you know, it actually rarely happens, to be honest with you -- those then cross them to me. And once they're assigned an ISN, you know, man, I know where everyone is every day any way.

So the answer to your question is a lot of people come, and there's a lot of visits. And we fly from -- I mean, the morning starts, we almost have this -- I hate to use the word "canned," but it's kind of gotten down to that, where we take them to see the youth school and they walk through and they see the youth in classes -- three or four different classes, they'll watch them on the football field, talk to the teachers.

I mean, we don't get in the middle of it. Anything they want, they do.

Now we're flying -- we hope to fly more -- over to Taji, which is just a 10-minute hop, where we're building a new facility which is really kind of a state of the art. They they see what (right?) will eventually really look like. Then they come back, and then they go through -- if their clearances are right, they go through and they actually watch, you know, how interrogations will take place. And they're sitting through that entire process, discuss what it is.

Then they walk out and they become a detainee. Sometimes they'll actually see detainees coming in. But they'll come in, they'll walk the whole line, go all the way through every step that they make, where they get the uniforms and a check for tattoos, and then they walk out and they see where their assessment process is.

And then, because they can right there, they'll go in and they'll see this Multinational Force Review Board committee. They'll watch detainees present their case. Some of you may know that we're working with a new system to have sort of a -- I don't want to use the word -- I want to use the right word -- it's not an advocate, sort of representative, to help the detainee.

And in all cases of a mentally impaired detainee, of which there's a large percentage, women, youth -- and we're experimenting with other groups -- you know, the few foreign fighters, the couple hundred that we have, third-country nationals, we use the same system, but we really work with them days ahead to say here's what's going to happen, here's what they're going to ask you. I mean, this is a discussion -- all right? -- and it's going to be a recommendation. It's not a court. You're not going to be tried. You're not going to get sent someplace.

And they watch all that. And then for the brave ones and the ones that we got the plane, we fly all the way down to Bucca, go to Kuwait, take helicopters over, and then we go to (al Bucca ?) and then they see the big numbers, because, as you know there's 3,000 up at Cropper and the rest of the 20,000 are at Bucca. And they see everything.

And I just come away with the fact -- because I do this with everybody every week -- I just come away with the impression that it wasn't what they thought it was. They're very enlightened about the law. The legal piece of it is vexing for them, you know. Like, geez, I mean they, like, don't have a court. And we talk about the Geneva -- we talk about, you know, human rights law versus international law and what those are for.

Now, again, I'm not speaking to Afghanistan or Gitmo. I'm just talking about -- (inaudible word).

Q So they see what it's not, but then they see what you are doing in terms of education and job training and so on. Do you have a sense it affects any of their views about our presence and role and success in Iraq?

GEN. STONE: Well, I can't speak to what they're thinking. You know, it would be an unfair characterization. But what I can say is, to an individual, they'll come out of that saying exactly what we say. You know, it's an imperfect system, but you're trying to do the right thing for all sides. The extremists -- I mean, the real extremists -- and they can see them and they can feel them. And we've got a couple compounds we're still working. I mean, you got to have shields up to go through them.

But they get that. Okay, "I got that." And then we point out not all those guys are. Some are surviving. And so we're still working to pluck them out.

Many of these guys are not extremists.

So we'll pull them out. They'll say, now I see that you can make a distinction. They look exactly the same. You know, they act the same. They're all the same. But the fact is they're different, right?

We spend our time. We live with them. I mean, there's nobody you know that's spent more time with al Qaeda than me, I mean, you know, talking to them, understanding them, looking at them, engaging them, watching -- the first thing I do every day; watch every interrogation.

So you know, now you watch them being separated. Then you walk amongst the detainees, who are motivated to do counter-coalition activities. And they were in a period of security risk.

And then you watch them go through their explanation of their case. You watch the very difficult decisions of the coalition force members, who are trying to understand, you know, in an imperfect world, how we got to where that is; do the right thing, for both the internal community and the external community.

They walk away feeling like we're doing the right thing. I never did get that. I mean, everybody is saying, we're doing the right thing; we're doing the right thing.

And I keep looking at them saying, we've got to do something different; we've got to do it better. Because al Qaeda adjusts. They adapt to every single thing that we do. And you know, we've taken away what was a primary recruiting tool for them. And you know, we have to be very cautious about how we do that.

And you know, some of the guys that go through this process, they've learned the process. So now they know how to process. They kind of know how to work themselves. And maybe they're squeaking out and they shouldn't be let out.

So it's just constant, you know? But I think they see that. That's my sense of it. I don't know. You'd have to talk to them.

Yes, sir.

Q Can I ask what ideas you drew on when you were designing this program? I imagine there isn't a handbook you can pull off the shelf.

So how did you pull it together? Did you look at historical examples? Did you look at other countries? Did you look at the civilian systems?

How did you -- what was the kind of underpinning behind it?

GEN. STONE: Yeah. Let me -- I guess there's sort of four bodies of research that I did personally.

The first one and perhaps the most meaningful one were the seven or so deradicalization programs, that are in the Islamic world in various stages. Some they don't want have disclosed; some are disclosed. But probably the most well-known one is over in Saudi Arabia. And so these programs are -- they have some steps to them. They have various purposes. They have a different orientation.

But for an American, who has a very distinct concept of individual liberty, and for whom prison means the absence of that individual liberty, that is a retribution, maybe a rehabilitation. You know, the corrections systems have such a high recidivist rate, in large part because they've got a drug problem.

So that model doesn't work. I mean, it just -- it's just not the same.

And so it helps you understand, for example, why the family is so vitally important to be a part of the process to get them re-engaged. And that's -- and I give you many, many conclusions that we came out of it with, but that was one body of knowledge.

The second body of knowledge are the professionals in the field who are largely successful Arabic engaged thinkers. I mean, those that are teaching someplace else, they may have articles and et cetera. But my own -- because this is a very pragmatic business. I mean, this is sweating and experimentation because you are spot-on; there is no book for this. There is no doctrine. There is nothing.

And so what we in this particular case did was go to, for example, the judicial system inside Iraq -- I mean, these guys are survivors. I mean, my goodness -- I don't know the real number, but in the high 20s have been killed. I mean, they are threatened to go be judges. I have judges that work with us full-time to conduct a pledge on the way out.

And so in the course of -- I said: Listen, I want them to have a pledge that's meaningful, and then when they went back to 1957, we created the law -- but in the course of that conversation, they give you tremendous insight into the Iraqi culture, why they're there, what would work, what wouldn't work. And so that, to me, was the most -- was very valuable. And I could speak at a great length about sort of perceptual mistakes that I think we were making before that we aren't making now that probably we're still making but just don't really know.

Then the third body is, there is a whole lot of basic research in terms of counterinsurgency engagement with populations. I mean, the work that General Petraeus did, 3-24, the field manual -- it is tremendously good guideline for trying to have the right orientation to the problem. In other words, it's not a conventional war. You've got a population. That makes you realize that despite the fact Bucca is, you know, a couple hundred meters from Kuwait and almost ready to drop in Umm Qasr, and everything else is taking place, you know, an hour and a half, two-hour flight north, it's not. It is very engaged in the population. This population affects that population. And because you're dealing with populations and because you're dealing with security, the counterinsurgency manual is disproportionately helpful in laying out that construct.

And then I think that the last one is almost a -- maybe this will sound counterintuitive, but is the detainees. The detainees themselves, many of whom I have hired back and work for me; many of whom, without going into great detail, have helped me construct this program; many of whom have said: Look, here are the ways in which the Takfirist and/or al Qaeda gain access to the mind.

Here's, then, what they do. Here's their steps. And they lay that all out.

And they'll lay it all out in a very clear, very understandable manner that you can back up and say, "But if I intervened right here, what would happen?" Well, the answer is, "They wouldn't go there, so that's a good place to start. Well, no, actually, the best place to start's here." And so they have helped with that.

And we have -- I mean, I don't know how many of you actually -- this is a -- I recognize a couple folks, but, you know, we have releases every day. But we have one ceremonial release so that we can let everybody come in. And they're not any special people who've been hand-picked. They just happened to be the 300 that were going out then.

But we invite all the press, and we invite people, and there's 30, 40, 50 cameras with people coming in, and then what we say to them is, "Any detainee who is no longer a detainee -- they're now a releasee -- who you want to talk to who wants to talk to you, you are free to do it." And they do that. The ministers will bring them up. They'll take them aside. You know, there's -- I'm sure there's probably one of you out here, but who will always say, "Tell me about the torture." And I've watched this now for more than 3,000 -- "tell me about the torture" -- and they have never said -- "I've never tortured -- I'm not tortured." They will not like the food at Bucco more than they like the food at Cropper. You know, they've got fleas or, you know, something like that, but nothing that -- you know, I'm an infantry guy that -- I wouldn't complain about my own lifestyle.

So that's how we put it all together. And it's changing all the time. The last comment that I made to Admiral Wright, the same comment that General Petraeus said to him as I was departing and that General Petraeus and I chatted about all the time was, "You have got to adapt." I said to my final -- in the final letter to the troops and in my final talks to them, "If Doug Stone comes back six months from now and this program has not changed in some way, you probably haven't adapted." So there has to be some meaningful change there.

You know, that's a long-winded explanation.

Yes, sir.

Q Sir, you faced some resistance initially in your push to release as many detainees as possible -- commanders on the ground there, whatever. We heard from General Hertling this morning and he's, obviously, supportive of you and of the program overall. But he expressed some concern about the recidivism rate and wanted to watch it carefully. He said that, you know, the early ones were probably the easy ones. Can you talk a little bit about the character of the people you're going to be releasing? Is it going to get harder?

GEN. STONE: I think Mark's right. And I believe exactly that. I mean, I'm a big believer in this evaluative process that also includes more information about what's on the ground. I mean, the more we engage the Iraqis -- much like this discussion here -- the more we're going to understand. So what's going to happen -- and again, my numbers are dated here by a week or so, but it's probably not too far off.

About 50 are going out. About 30 are coming in. Okay, so the net drop per day, 20, probably about right. Of those 30 coming in, I think the division commanders have gotten much better at determining that the guy's a real, legitimate, you know, imperative security risk. The conditions are perhaps a little bit less chaotic on the ground, so they can collect more information.

So the guys coming in are probably a more certain imperative security risk than they were before. So you have to kind of say that's not a guy you'd let out after the first six-month review, right?

But if that number starts to drop off just a little bit, many of our guys -- and we've done more than -- well, I think we're approaching 40,000 of these Multinational Forces Review Committees -- so guys have gone through a couple of times now. I mean, as a guy goes through a couple times and the guy -- you know, and the board says, you know, we're not releasing him, what's going to happen is the population's going to harden. And it's going to get further and further to where, you know, at least the U.S. members at this point are going to say: I'm just not comfortable with the guy -- letting out. So the releases will kind of drop down. They should. I mean, as long as the number coming in doesn't go up, the quality of the case stays high or it goes up, he's exactly right. The number of releases will kind of drop down, because we've gone through the first step.

Now, there have always been -- and I -- there have been a total -- just under 50,000 cumulative releases since 2004 -- probably more, but we didn't keep records in 2003. Even with that number, the percentage was only about 6 percent actually ultimately came back to the theater internment facility. So in general, the vast majority of guys tend not to go back. Another way to say 6 percent is 94 percent didn't go back. So there's always been a natural inclination to go out, try to opportunistically get some money or do something and then -- got caught, don't want to do that again, too long; I'm not going back. There's always been that. I think that will still prevail.

But clearly, already, we're seeing a hardening of the population where there are guys that are as bad as they come. I mean, you don't want to hear the stories. And you know, and we're holding them in modular housing units, these detainee housing units that we put together in small numbers. And they are looking more like a corrections problem. Ultimately, these are the real difficult cases that they U.S. and Iraqis will have to get together and say, you know, hey, listen, if we don't have grounds to put them into your legal system and you've -- you know, we know it's an imperative security risk, what do you want to do? And then we'll have to -- they'll have to work that out. That's not happened to date.

MR. WHITMAN: We have time for one more.

GEN. STONE: Oh.

Q (On that ?).

GEN. STONE: I'm sorry. I think we should --

Q Back in March, you used the figure of 9,000 in the hard group that you saw. What's the role of Taji and the new facility in Ramadi -- (off mike)?

GEN. STONE: Yeah. If I could put this in context, I actually didn't say that.

What I said was, today, there -- actually I think it was 8,000 -- was there were 24,000 in detention at the time.

And I said, right now if you look at the results, for the last two months of the Multinational Force Review Board, they have said about 50 percent should be released. And it leaves about a third. Some should still be in programs, still be working their way out, but about a third. That was about 8,000.

So I said numerically if you looked at and you just stopped the clock right now, you'd end up with a number of 8,000. But to the point that we just made, the nature changes, right?

So in other words, the board results have already shifted from about 50 to 46 percent. And so you're going to see less voted out, if you will, or less recommended for a return.

So the Taji building construct was really to try to highlight the learning that we got from the theater internment facility reintegration center research that we did. That was our concept. We developed that.

Our hope is that, if the families can be more proximate, the civic leadership can be more proximate, as opposed to way down in Bucca, where nobody can get there without a long, multiple-day drive, what can happen then is, the detainee can flow in. They can be working on the skills and be going through all the programs that are there. The civic community can engage, because they're there. And they can then take them and move them back out.

The greatest success we've had to date, and I'm convinced it will be even greater when the, you know, the program that was -- in the first question is brought up, when we're able to bring the community into, and they engage -- because the community can control these guys or not. And if they don't, they can find somebody, ultimately an Iraqi police, army, others who can.

They're the ones who are going to have to take care of them. What we're saying right now is, during our time on the ground, these guys are an imperative security risk.

So the closer that facility is to them, the better off it will be to the community. And they are, the community of Iraq are, these are citizens of Iraq. They're coming back to the -- unless they put them in, you know, a prison and change them with something, they're going to come back.

So they're going to have to work with them. And that's what Taji was meant to be. And I think Taji will be a tremendous success. It's at least an experiment of worth.

Q Ramadi?

(Cross talk.)

GEN. STONE: Ramadi is being built. The question is, do we need that number of bed spaces, as the number goes down? And that's being looked at right now.

I can't say with 100 percent certainty that Ramadi is going to be opened per se. I can say it looks that it will be built. But it's not 100 percent certain that we're going to need it, because of the numbers between Cropper, some of the

programs that are going on with Bucca and Taji.

(Cross talk.)

Q (Off mike) -- get access, to any of the interrogations or to tapes of them?

GEN. STONE: I'd have to check but I don't think so. I don't think we distribute that to anybody. I would have to say no. They do talk to the detainees, who have been interrogated. And they'll pretty much tell them what the course or the condition of the interrogation is.

I mean, these are all confidential.

They're very -- they're a tremendously professional organization. They have been -- you know, I probably should've added them in as another -- (inaudible). They have been just remarkably helpful to me in terms of understanding a civilian internee, what works and what's not right and how to fit it together.

So I work -- I hope they think that way, but I certainly work very closely with them. And I think they're a tremendous organization. And they have helped construct this. Many of the suggestions we get didn't make sense when I first got there, but in the construct of this new way of thinking, they fit very, very comfortably. But I'm not aware that they get any in interrogation. I could check and find out.

Q General, could you clarify for us how many you expect to be in this category that can't be tried, can't be released, need to be held? And can you also say why they couldn't be tried, for example? And I know it's outside your lane, but is there an analogy there to Guantanamo, where we're also told there's a group that can't be tried, can't be released, has to be held?

GEN. STONE: You know, I can't speak to anybody in Gitmo. Let me sort of -- let me sort of put this in context. I think what will really happen is you're going to get down to a number -- and the Iraqi judicial system and the U.S. forces that are there and all the other support agency will say, "Look, we just believe this guy's, you know, got -- you know, he's really a bad guy." They're going to go back and -- they'll go and investigate. They will go back to the source. They'll go back and talk to individuals now that there's a security condition where they can do it, and they will go and build the case and evidence.

I mean, my experience with the Iraqi judicial system has been very favorable. I get this question often, "Hey, you know, do the one sect -- you know, do they, like, favor another sect?" The answer's no. They lay down the law. They have a law. You know, it's not different than any legal system. You know, some people don't like the verdict that comes out of it, but they follow the law. And if they have evidence, they apply the evidence.

So my guess is, my belief is, my hope is that they'll simply go out and find the evidence on these guys. Now, if they don't, they're going to have a tough decision because, you know -- and again, it comes back to the timing of U.S. forces on the ground, et cetera. The Iraqi people, in their own tribal culture, in their own manner, can deal with these guys. One way or the other, they'll deal with them. And that's, I think, where it goes. I mean, it just -- we're there to help Iraqis build security and build their community.

There are so few as to not even be particularly a great concern that would, you know, be able to orchestrate, you know, something inside the United States. That's not the kind of detainee that we have. Now, this is where motivations and things are separate. So what I'm very focused on, to be honest with you, are those that are going to go back out into Iraq.

It is conceivable that there are some that might be in that sort of, you know, situation.

But I think there's always evidence out there -- remember how we collected it -- doesn't mean that it didn't happen. Doesn't mean you (don't know ?) those people. They may still be there. It's just that, you know, when the battle's moving, you can't get it back.

And this is not, you know, the -- the perfect system has courts, cops and corrections. And these places where we're at don't have courts, cops and corrections. And if they do, not everybody's sure they're all working together. So -- but that system will happen. It is happening in Iraq.

Q So you think that most of these 8,000 or whatever their number turns out to be will go through that kind of process and the final number will be what you said earlier -- I think in the neighborhood of a thousand that are left that you don't want to release but can't go -- can't get that evidence.

GEN. STONE: Yeah, I don't want to commit -- please don't write down a thousand. I mean, I don't know what the number is. I mean, I have my own belief because I've looked at all the records, and I have kind of an in-the-culture context of the way I see it, you know, and the number is a lot less than people are fearful of.

So -- but there are guys in there that are clearly in there. And -- I mean, there are guys who came in that are labeled foreign fighters, but you know, it's not like foreign fighters like they would come to the United States. I mean, these are foreign fighters that came across to do a mission and do something. And they are a threat, and they're real, and they need to be taken off the streets, and without them off the streets, people die.

So you know, it's just hard. I can't -- I -- if I could give you the number, I would. But I think the best thing to say is there will be a process -- and my sense of the negotiation that's going on now is that what will -- what needs to come out of that is a process that they agree to between the U.S. and Iraq on how to deal with this.

I have not had the leadership -- I don't care who it is -- say to me: We got to release them all. I just never had that. I don't care what vice president, I don't care what sect they're from; they never say that. They always say: We got to keep the really bad guys. And I always say to them: You've got to be a part of that. And they go: Absolutely, we do. We need to have -- we need to figure that process out.

So you're dealing with a very cooperative environment, with the current leadership, who wants to take these guys.

Now, when it comes right down to it, is this -- is some guy's bad guy another guy's good guy? Yeah, probably, and we'll just have to deal with that.

But this is an imperfect science. I mean, heck, as best I can tell, so is our court system, you know. It doesn't mean that guilty guys always get found guilty.

Q How do you get beyond the religious differences? I mean, do you separate them by sect, or is there reconciliation that's actually taking place within your general population?

GEN. STONE: You may not have seen our research on this, but the research that we've done and we've distributed and published it to many people -- Iraqi men of this age are by and large not polarized that way.

I can give you pictures of hundreds and thousands of guys that play soccer together that are from different sects. Eighty-some percent couldn't care if their sister or their relative, cousin, married the other sect. Most of them are. Most of the guys that we have are from one sect, have married another.

Where we have to separate -- and this, I would hope, makes sense -- is if you have an organization who has been chartered to kill the other sect, then we separate them. And that's by and large what we've done. And that's why we go through this process. We have at least a couple compounds where they're mixed right now in all the programs, I don't care what they are -- education, vo-tech, the sports, the jobs -- they're all intermixed. All of them. And there's not been one incident ever.

So a lot of this is a construct of the way many of you see Iraq, because the leadership will sort of carry a flag and they'll kind of go that way, but down at the people, our experience has been it's not that way. It's not that way in detention. They're very tolerant of each other's sect. I mean, to be honest with you, the guys that we have aren't particularly very religious. And I can talk to you about the specifics; I just don't have my numbers in front of me. I would

be glad to. It's a very interesting study that I'm very confident in the numbers on.

So it isn't something to be overly concerned about. It is one of the things I was asked earlier, you know, about people visiting. They are fascinated by that. "Well, you know, all these guys with the red tee-shirts and green tee-shirts, if you put the green tee-shirts with the red tee-shirts, they'll kill each other." No, no, it's not that way at all. I mean, they're not divided that way. They don't think that way. They don't argue that way.

The Takfirists, they will argue Muslim or not. But that's a rather distinct difference. I mean, these guys are like the Taliban that we saw in Pakistan and Afghanistan. I mean, these guys are one way or the highway, and everybody else who doesn't believe their way is excommunicated, Muslim or not.

Even those guys we work with in long programs where we've been able to get some movement, which I think is some of the most encouraging -- you know, we probably really do need to draw this to an end.

But I will tell you, one of the things that under General Petraeus's leadership in particular, that he allows guys like me, who -- even in my going-out statement, I said, you know, great leaders oftentimes have to take great risk. And I clearly have been his great risk. I mean, you know, you can't run detention with the history that we've had and not think, you know, something bad goes on down there.

But by allowing us to take that risk and about allowing the troops, the individual troops that feel empowered to understand the big picture, here's what we're trying to do. We're trying to find moderates, work with the moderates, they marginalize the extremists, and then we move on. That's my answer to you about the legal question. I mean, the Iraqi society has got to take this on. That's where they're going to go. And they will. They are going to do that. It's a process to get there, but they're going to get there.

In the course of doing that, we have learned so much about who al Qaeda is, we have learned so much about how they recruit and what their intent is, we have learned so much about how to counter them and how to engage with a very clear program that breaks away their support base, that I mean, you know, it may well be invaluable. I mean, I don't know if it's applicable outside of Iraq. I don't want to extend it beyond that. I don't want to say, oh geez -- (inaudible) -- but I will tell you, we are learning about ways to deal with radicalization, the process of it. We are learning what this very clear enemy wants to do, how they intend to use space, what they can't do -- no matter what they try to say at the end of the day, they're not able to deliver -- how to counter their arguments, what their arguments are. I mean, it's invaluable.

And by running this population engagement program called "detention" in a different manner, and with General Petraeus's permission to do that, we have been very fortunate to understand better the nature of this enemy.

And for those who often -- I guess that's another thing; they say, well, geez, there's no al Qaeda in Iraq. Come on, man. I mean, you know, come with me, I'll let you -- introduce them to you. You know, I mean, just sit and talk to them. They say, well, who we are, "Well, I work for al Qaeda." "Well, why?" "Well, because I believe this." It sounds just like what they say in the recruiting films.

So, al Qaeda wants this territory. They want it and they want these people. And they want what they can get from this.

And we are finding ways to stop it. It's imperfect and it's gradual. But it's moving forward.

Many of you, I know, were not in Iraq in April, May, June of last year. But it was rough. And I mean, we fly over and drive over and go into those places now all the time.

And so you do feel a sense of change and you see it. I see it in the people. I release thousands of people, who come up and hug us. I mean, you know, they're not fighting guards. I mean, they're happy. And like I said, we've got them coming back to work for us.

It's not perfect. I'm not a judge of that. But it certainly is different than what people say.

Thank you for the opportunity to chat with you.

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