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Presenter: Commander of the Iraq Assistance Group, U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Dana Pittard **June 25, 2007**

DoD News Briefing with Brig. Gen. Dana Pittard at the Pentagon

(Note: General Pittard appears via teleconference from Iraq.)

BRYAN WHITMAN (deputy assistant secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Well, good morning, and welcome.

And good afternoon to General Pittard. Can you hear me, General Pittard? This is Bryan Whitman at the Pentagon.

GEN. PITTARD: I can hear you loud and clear.

MR. WHITMAN: Very good. Well, thank you for taking some time this afternoon. This is Brigadier General Dana Pittard, who is the commander of the Iraq Assistance Group. And unfortunately for us, this marks -- this week marks the end of his tenure as the commander for that unit. And we thought that given his vast experience over these past many months, that it would be a good time for him to provide you with an update on the military transition teams that are embedded with the Iraqi army.

I think it was August the last time that you briefed us from Baghdad, and we appreciate you taking the time, as I know your schedule is very busy.

With that, let me turn it over to you for a brief update, and then we'll take some questions from here, General.

GEN. PITTARD: Okay. Well, first of all, good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to talk with you on this actually beautiful day here in Iraq.

As the commanding general of the Iraq Assistance Group, it's been my honor to be a part of helping the Iraqi security forces to progress. I'm in command of a joint headquarters made up of Army, airmen, Marines and sailors, who are devoted to assisting the Iraqi security forces in so many ways. In my travels around with Iraqi security force leaders throughout Iraq, from the streets of Samarra to Baghdad to the Iranian border and throughout Iraq, I've seen on a daily basis, on a weekly basis and a monthly basis the progress of the Iraqi security forces.

And I will tell you that the Iraqi security forces are in fact progressing.

Now, there are issues, and we are working those issues. It's still a work in progress, but the growth of the Iraqi security forces over the past couple of years has really been quite dramatic in many ways. But again, there's a lot of work to be done.

The duties of the Iraq Assistance Group now have grown to where we're now the overall executive agency for Multinational Corps Iraq for all Iraqi security forces, to include not only the Iraqi army, the national police, Department of Border Enforcement but the Iraqi police and the Facilities Protection Services, and really all of the Iraqi security forces.

So at this time, I'll take any questions that you may have.

MR. WHITMAN: Very good. We'll get into right here, then, and start with -- looks like Andrew's ready.

Q General, it's Andrew Gray from Reuters. You said that the Iraqi forces are making progress. Realistically, when are they going to be at the stage where they can take provincial control all across Iraq? And in particular, how are the police doing? Because there's been more concern in the past about the police than the army.

GEN. PITTARD: Would you say your question again? I think it's coming up pretty loud in my ear here. If we can just turn it down a little bit.

Q Maybe I'll talk quieter as well. General, I wonder if you could tell us when they will progress, the Iraqi forces, to the extent that they can be the lead force in all the provinces across Iraq. And in particular, can you tell us about the police, because there's been more concern, as you know, about the police than the army in recent months.

GEN. PITTARD: Well, again, I think it'll take -- obviously it'll take time. And I think it will take a couple of years before the Iraqi security forces are going to be able to fully take control of the security situation in Iraq.

There are some areas, though, and some provinces where the Iraqi security forces are in fact taking the lead. We have down south in Maysan, in Dhi Qar and the provinces of Muthanna, where the Iraqi security forces, including the Iraqi police, are in fact taking the lead. We're seeing that also in Erbil and Sulimaniyah and Dohuk, where the Iraqi police services are in fact taking the lead. But the Iraqi police services are in fact the local police.

And of course, they and the local police they're more vulnerable to local conditions and local biases and in some areas where there's mixed Shi'a and Sunni neighborhoods to local sectarian issues. And so that's certainly a work in progress, and I think if we had a scale of most vulnerable to sectarianism and least vulnerable, on that scale the most vulnerable would be the Iraqi police services as well as the facility police -- I'm sorry -- facility protection services.

MR. WHITMAN: Let's go to Jeff.

Q General, if local police are vulnerable to local intimidation, why not have -- take police from elsewhere and bring them in so you don't have local people subject to local factors, local forces?

GEN. PITTARD: That was tried a couple years ago, and that's to bring in police from other areas into areas they're not familiar with, into other provinces and cities, and it frankly didn't work very well. It is much better to have local personnel, locally recruited police who are familiar with the neighborhoods. What we have to do, though, is to make sure that that police service and police force is as professional as possible and in picking good

leaders that possibly may be out from, you know, from other areas. But we found that having local police who know the neighborhoods is still the best option and is now making sure that they are professional is the key challenge there.

MR. WHITMAN: Pamela.

Q This is Pam Hess with United Press International. General Odierno told us last week that a large number of national police brigade commanders and battalion commanders have been replaced because of sectarian issues. Could you lay out those numbers for us and tell us the process, how you go about figuring out who's bad and who's not and what the result of that has been, where the leaders have been replaced?

GEN. PITTARD: I can.

This time last year many people on the coalition side and in America were writing off the national police as just merely an arm of the Shi'a militia, and over time we've seen quite a change with the national police. And it started with the minister of Interior, Minister Bolani, installing a new national police commander, Major General Hussein, who has made a difference. He and the minister of Interior, Minister Bolani, came in with a mandate for ensuring that sectarian-bias leaders were removed from the national police, and as one could expect, there were many obstacles to that goal.

But since Major General Hussein took over last October, October 2006, both national police division commanders were removed, seven of the nine national police brigade commanders have been removed, and of those seven, five were removed because they had sectarian biases.

Quite a few of the 27 national police battalion commanders have in fact been removed. And in fact, this time last year, almost the entire command structure of the national police were, in fact, Shi'a. We've had the report now that Major Hussein has really done a good job with an outreach program of bringing in Sunni leaders. Fifty percent of the division commanders -- that's one of two -- is Sunni. Four of the nine national police brigade commanders are now Sunni. Nine to 10 of the 27 national police battalion commanders are in fact Sunni. Now, there's still more work to be done, but General Hussein has made a world of difference with the national police.

I would add also along with that, in changing out leaders, the national police began, with the help of the coalition, a very aggressive training program where an entire national police brigade was taken out of their battlespace or their area of operations in the Baghdad area and then taken for four weeks of concentrated police and tactical training away from Baghdad. And we have seen some results, some very positive results from that training. That was very painful for our operational plans in taking out an entire brigade, but it was well worth it in getting back a better-trained national police brigade.

MR. WHITMAN: Go ahead. Courtney.

Q General, this is Courtney Kube from NBC News. Based on what you're seeing the strengths and the capabilities of the Iraqi police and the Iraqi army, do you think that any gains that are made with this surge or plus-up or whatever you want to call it in Iraq on the American part -- do you think they'll be able to maintain that?

GEN. PITTARD: Well, again, the goal of the current operations is to make certain areas secure, whether it's Baghdad or whether it's Diyala province or Al Anbar and other areas, so that there is a security basic foundation so that then the Iraqi security forces over time can take control and then it's within their capability to keep stability going, which will allow the Iraqi government time to in fact be able to govern.

So it's going to take some time, and we'll see how long that takes.

Q Do you feel confident that the Iraqi police and the Iraqi army will be able to maintain that after the U. S. presence begins to draw down or move to other areas?

GEN. PITTARD: I'm confident that the Iraqi army will be able to do the job. But again, our ultimate goal is not for the Iraqi army to be in the streets of the cities of Iraq. The ultimate goal of the Iraqi government and the coalition is for the Iraqi police to do that, and that will take some time.

MR. WHITMAN: Jim.

Q Sir, this is Jim Garamone from American Forces Press Service. You've been there a year now. I was wondering if you could describe how the roles of the coalition training teams have evolved over that year.

GEN. PITTARD: Well actually, I've been here a couple of years in that I had a previous tour in Iraq. And I think that gives more of a depth and breadth of where we were in 2003, 2004, 2005 and where we are now.

The embedded transition teams have, in fact, made a tremendous difference. The idea of the embedded transition teams came from a former MNF-I commander, General Casey, and then the MNSTC-I commander -- that's Multinational Security Transition Command Iraq commander, then Lieutenant General Petraeus, and that began in about September 2004 with early advisory teams. Over time, that advisory effort has increased and grown to where we have it now, where in fact it is a priority mission, and it's 11 to 15 personnel teams that are embedded throughout the Iraqi security forces, and they've made a tremendous difference.

When I left here in Iraq from the last tour in early 2005, there really were only two, possibly four Iraqi army divisions, all of which were struggling. Now we have 10 fairly capable Iraq army divisions, and soon there will be an 11th, 12th, and a 13th division by early 2008. Again, part of that is from the embedded transition teams making a difference as far as their advisory effort, and then being partnered with coalition force battalions, brigade combat teams and regimental combat teams throughout Iraq.

Q Sir, can I just have a follow on that? How about specifically the police transition teams, how has that changed or how is that working now?

GEN. PITTARD: Our effort with the police transition teams has also increased. There are close to 200 police transition teams throughout Iraq, and in my opinion, still not enough. I wish we had enough police transition teams in every single district, every single police district throughout Iraq. But we've had to make certain decisions and choices as to where priority effort is, but that has made a difference also.

I might add, also, our international police liaison officers, who are international police officers, primarily American, are with the police transition teams, working in precincts. We've seen some success with many of those police transition teams in Fallujah, in Mosul, and we're starting to see some results in Baghdad, but it does vary.

MR. WHITMAN: Let's go over here to Al.

Q General, it's Al Pessin from Voice of America. I wanted to try to get a clarification on Courtney's question, and I also have a question about the MiTT teams.

You indicated it would take some time for the Iraqi forces to be able to control these areas, like Diyala and the others, that the American forces are now clearing. So, I mean, what is the plan? Are the American forces going to stay in these areas for a period of months? Or are the Iraqis going to move in fairly soon, so that the Americans can move on and do other things? I think I'm confused a little bit about what the plan is on that now.

And as far as the MiTT teams go, about six months ago or so there was a lot of talk about increasing the

size of the teams, giving them their own transport and security so that they could be more mobile and get out and do their jobs better. Has that happened? Do you have the teams up to the numbers and the level of training that you want to have?

GEN. PITTARD: Well, I'll answer your first point first and again, as I mentioned before, it will take time. And we've really got to be careful, because in fact I just came in, flew in, from Diyala. I spent the morning, early afternoon with Lieutenant General Ali, the Iraqi ground forces commander, and we walked the streets of Baqubah with several different 5th Iraqi Army units that were there. So I got a pretty good perspective on some things going on in Baqubah and Diyala.

But we've got to be careful. Because it was just a few years ago, by the end of 2005, where, believe it or not, many people were saying Diyala province was going to be one of the first provinces to go to provincial Iraqi control. It was going that well. There were two brigades in Diyala province at that time, two coalition force brigades, with approximately eight maneuver battalions.

Because of that success we felt as a coalition that we could withdraw our forces and allow the Iraqis to take over. I believe that was way too soon.

We drew down the forces to one single brigade, with only two coalition maneuver battalions, by January 2006. And as you know, in February 2006, with the golden mosque bombing and the unleashing of sectarian violence throughout Iraq, especially in areas where there are Sunni and Shi'as living in close proximity, such as Baghdad and Diyala province, there just wasn't enough coalition force force structure there in Diyala to be able to keep a lid on that violence. And now we're here today, where we now have three coalition force brigades in Diyala, nearly 10,000 troops, along with their Iraqi counterparts, trying to now regain stability in Diyala province.

So I would say that that is a lesson learned. A lesson learned is, do not move our force structure down too quickly, do not draw down too quickly when we think there's a glimmer of success. It will take time. It will take time for the Iraqi security forces to be able to take over from our forces.

So that was the first question you had.

The second piece or second point of your question had to do with the enhanced transition teams. I thought there was a very good plan in November and December of 2006, called the transition bridging strategy, which called for enhancing the size of our transition teams from in-theater assets. Average size of our teams are about 11 person-teams. It called for doubling, tripling, in some cases quadrupling teams, to make that advisory effort even more effective.

But a reality sunk in when General Odierno, the MNC-I commander, and then General Petraeus, the new MNF-I commander, took command. And part of that was, there has to be a basic foundation of security in order to do that transitioning. So first we must establish security in certain areas to then be able to enhance the transition teams for that advisory effort to be that much more effective, at least in Baghdad and Diyala and a couple of other places.

But we are seeing the results of enhancing transition teams up in Nineveh province, up in the north, in Mosul. We're seeing the progress of having enhanced transition teams in Al Anbar province, and that's making a difference.

So in some areas we are in fact doing that transition bridging strategy, but generally throughout Iraq, we're still going to have to wait until we get a certain level of security established in areas like Baghdad and Diyala.

MR. WHITMAN: Luis.

Q General, based on your comments just now about the early transition or the thinking of an early transition in Diyala, what leads you to believe now that Iraqi security forces are more capable of the task than it seems that they were earlier, when the security situation, you felt, had improved enough in Diyala to maybe transition provincial control?

GEN. PITTARD: Well, there are some differences. If you remember, just three years ago, in April 2004, when the coalition forces experienced really a(n) operational planner's nightmare, which -- we were fighting Sunni insurgents at the same time as Shi'a militia men, when Muqtada Sadr's elements in An Najaf, Karbala and other cities kind of exploded, as well as places such as Baghdad, Baqubah and other places in Iraq.

At that time, the struggling Iraqi army and Iraqi National Guard at that time fell apart in many ways, and in fact they had to be encouraged and pushed to fight.

That is just not the case anymore. The Iraqi army in particular is willing to fight. And they're fighting for a sovereign Iraq. They're not fighting for us, the coalition forces; they're fighting for Iraq. They're fighting for their people. And so that is a key difference.

But to establish and build and an Iraqi security forces again, as I've said, takes time -- to establish a logistical capability, to be able to be the self-reliant force that they need to be, to be able to fight internal threats and then eventually look out and be able to take care -- external threats for Iraq. But it will take time. It'll take years.

MR. WHITMAN: Let's go back -- Anne.

Q To follow up on your answer to Luis and to Al earlier, it seems that the coalition has to keep learning this lesson about not reducing its forces too much. I mean, this happened in Nineveh province in 2004, and it's happened in other places. What have you guys learned about what it needs to look like on the ground when you can reduce forces so that you don't run into this Baqubah-Nineveh problem again?

GEN. PITTARD: Well, I think that that's a lesson that we are in fact learning. We're seeing in Al Anbar province -- there are some areas where in fact the Iraqi security forces are taking more and more of a lead. An example of that would be the city of Fallujah. I just visited Fallujah 10 days ago with Lieutenant General Ali, when he visited the 2nd Brigade of the 1st Iraqi Army, and they for the most part have the lead in providing security in Fallujah. Now, eventually, they will need transition over to the Iraqi police services, but that is probably a pretty good example of slowly and methodically transitioning over to the Iraqi security forces.

If you look at Nineveh province today in Mosul -- in fact, the 2nd Iraqi Army Division is the primary force there for security, working closely with the Iraqi police. In fact, it's probably one of the best relationships between the Iraqi army and the Iraqi police, at least working relationships, that I've seen in Iraq.

But from the coalition side, there's really only -- even though there's a brigade up there, there's in fact only one maneuver battalion doing operations in the Mosul area. Everything else is being done by Iraqi security forces, from the 3rd Iraqi Army Division, which is outside of Mosul, and inside of Mosul, the 2nd Iraqi Army Division, along with the police.

So I would tell you that we have learned those lessons, but it's something that we have to keep reinforcing. We cannot be in a hurry to withdraw our coalition forces from Diyala province, as an example.

MR. WHITMAN: Let's go over here to Tom.

Q General, it's Tom Bowman with NPR. I understand that the Iraqi security forces are supposed to

grow from I think 349,000 now to 390,000 by the end of the year. And General Petraeus and General Dempsey have both called for tens of thousands of increases in the Iraqi security forces. Give us your thoughts on the growth of the ISF, what it means for -- you know, more American money and American trainers.

GEN. PITTARD: Well, the impetus of the growth of the Iraqi security forces is coming from the Iraqi government, from Prime Minister Maliki, who began the prime minister's initiative, which has called for a certain amount of growth in the Iraqi security forces, and we're in support of that.

Over half of the funding for the Iraqi security forces is in fact coming from the Iraqi government, and that's a good thing. We're also assisting through the Foreign Military Sales Program, where they, I believe, by the end of this year the Iraqi government will invest approximately \$1.6 billion in that program, and that makes sense.

The growth of the Iraqi security forces, I think, is a good idea, but it comes with some caution also because it takes time to grow the kind of seasoned leaders that are needed to command those forces. We found that it's not that difficult to recruit young soldiers, young jundis or soldiers, as they're called, or young police officers. It doesn't take too long to train young lieutenants, but it takes much longer to train seasoned non-commissioned officers and majors, lieutenant colonels and brigadier generals. So with the growth of the Iraqi army and the Iraqi security forces, it will be larger, but it will take time for it to become the professional force that the prime minister and the government envision.

Q Follow up, if it's going to be 390 by the end of this year, project into 2008. What do the numbers look like, do you think?

GEN. PITTARD: I'm not sure. But I'll tell you, just from the Iraqi army perspective, as I've said, they're working on an 11th Division now, they've stood up an 11 Division -- 11th Iraqi Army Division Headquarters, which should be able to take battlespace some time this fall. We think that in early 2008 a 12th Division will be created in the Kirkuk area and a 13th Division will be stationed somewhere between Basra and al-Nasiriyah.

Again, we're seeing that growth. We're seeing also growth in the Iraqi police services, and I would say, as it should be, because in a stabilized Iraq, it is the Iraqi police that will be the first responders. And if it's something beyond their capability, it would then be the national police, and if it's beyond their capability, and then it would be the Iraqi army. And that's what I think it'll look like in early 2008.

MR. WHITMAN: Let's go back over here to Jeff.

Q General, Jeff Schogol with Stars and Stripes. You had talked about the progress the Iraqi security forces made between 2004 and now, but in July of 2006, most of Diyala was turned over to the Iraqi security forces, including, I believe, the 2nd Brigade of the 5th Iraqi Army Division, which, I believe, is considered one of the best. What happened?

GEN. PITTARD: Well, clearly, the 5th Iraqi Army Division wasn't ready for many reasons. As far as its personnel, it wasn't up to full strength, it had issues with logistical capability. The 2nd Brigade 5th IA had some very inspired leadership. Brigadier General Talabani was one of the better brigade commanders throughout Iraq. But still, Diyala province, because of the fact that al Qaeda and other Sunni insurgents and even Shi'a militias in the south have become so ingrained and implanted into the province, it just was too much for the Iraqi security forces at that time to be able to handle on their own.

It will take a partnership with the coalition forces to really rout them out and provide stability over a period of time for then the Iraqi security forces then to take command and take the lead.

Q Follow-up. Given the example you gave in Diyala, on Friday, Lieutenant General Odierno said that he hoped that Iraqi security forces could take larger security responsibility in April and that could possibly lead to

a reduction in U.S. forces. Given what you just explained about Diyala, is that realistic?

GEN. PITTARD: Oh, it is realistic in many areas in Iraq. But in Diyala province, the way it is right now, it will take some time. It will take a coalition force presence there, partnered with the 5th Iraqi army division and the Iraqi police to provide lasting stability so that the provincial government can then take control. I mean, I clearly remember Diyala province just a couple of years ago. I commanded a brigade combat team there; I was there for nearly 13 months. I nearly shed a tear when I saw Baqubah today, that the markets aren't up, the projects that we'd spent so much time on together with the Iraqi government are now in many places in shambles. It will take time to rebuild Baqubah and Diyala province.

MR. WHITMAN: Well General, we have reached the end of our allocated time for today, and I did want to turn it back to you for any closing comments that you might have or anything you might want to add to any of the questions that we've asked here today.

GEN. PITTARD: Well, I would tell you that the growth and progress of Iraqi security forces is moving forward.

Are there challenges? There's lots of challenges, whether it's logistical capability, whether in some areas it's professionalism and sectarian biases. But I believe over time the Iraqi security forces will be able to take control of the security in Iraq.

And I will also tell you that the more and more that I and other coalition force members interact with our Iraqi counterparts and with the Iraqi people, the more and more you realize that we have a stake in this. We have a stake in supporting the Iraqi people as well as the American people in ensuring that Iraq becomes a stable nation that is not an area where terrorism can fester. And so we're making progress in that area, but I would ask the American people and the world for their patience because it will take time to do this.

And I thank you again for the opportunity to speak today. Thank you.

MR. WHITMAN: Well, General, thank you for today and for the time you've given us in the past. And we hope that you will -- one of the lessons that you will have learned is the value of this and you'll pass it on to your successor so that he'll join us in future formats like this also.

GEN. PITTARD: And I hope to see you again, because I'm sure that I'll return to Iraq someday in the future -- ideally as a tourist. (Laughter.)

MR. WHITMAN: Thank you.

GEN. PITTARD: Thank you.

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