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**Presenter: Commander, Multinational Division Center and 3rd Infantry Division Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch**

**August 24,  
2007**

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**DoD News Briefing with Maj. Gen. Lynch from the Pentagon, Arlington, Va.**

(Note: Maj. Gen. Lynch appears via video teleconference from Iraq.)

COL. KECK: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the Pentagon Briefing Room again. It seems like it's been a busy week for us. Appreciate you being here. I'm Colonel Gary Keck, the director of the Press Office, and it's my privilege to introduce you today to Major General Rick Lynch, whom you all know -- commander of Multinational Division-Center and 3rd Infantry Division. His command took responsibility for operations in their sector in April, and this is the third time he's been with us in this format, so we welcome him back again. And he's speaking to us from Camp Victory.

And with that, I'm going to turn it over to General Lynch for his opening comments. Sir?

GEN. LYNCH: Thanks, Gary. I appreciate that. And, hey, folks. Good to be with you. We've got about a two-year history of working these things together. There's a lot I want to talk to you about today. I want to cover several important topics.

I want to talk about the enemy. Remember, I talked about before, the enemy here is really three sets: It's Sunni extremists, it's Shi'a extremists and it's Iranian influence. I want to emphasize the Iranian influence piece as part of this briefing.

I want to talk to you about the effects of the surge operation we've been doing now since the 15th of June and give you a sense of what's happened over the 60-plus days we've been working this. We got a great operation going on right now we call Marne Husky; I want to highlight that for you. And then I got to spend some time to talk to you about the concerned citizens program; you know, we got concerned citizens that are stepping up throughout the battlespace. And then I'll take whatever questions you want, and we'll talk about whatever you want to talk about.

First let me focus on Iranian influence inside my area of responsibility. As you all know, I'm the commander for Multinational Division-Center, and it's an area equivalent in size to the state of West Virginia. Our headquarters stood up as part of the troop surge, and we've been executing this important mission for more than four months now. Since June the 15th, we've expanded our presence throughout areas that had been previously insurgent strongholds.

General Odierno has charged Task Force Marne with securing the areas south and east of Baghdad and stopping the flow of weapons and violence through those areas. We're committing troops to these neighborhoods, and with the help of the Iraqi army and the police, demonstrating to the Iraqi people that we're not leaving until they have security and they're capable of maintaining it through their own efforts.

And that's what's happening as we work these surge operations. We get to an area, the locals there, the first question they ask is, "Are you staying?" And once they're convinced we're staying, the question then becomes, "How can we help?" What we see as a result of that commitment is Iraqi citizens are coming forward and they're indeed saying, "What can we do to help?"

Over the last four months, we've seen an interesting shift. Iraqi citizens are coming to us to provide information. These citizens are speaking up about what they've seen, they're talking about what they've heard and about any activity that jeopardizes the rebuilding of their country.

From that, we're now having concerned citizens programs operating in both Sunni and Shi'a areas alike, with local Iraqis manning checkpoints and giving us important information on insurgents and weapons caches, and that's led to a dramatic turnaround in the security situation in some areas; not all the areas, but in some areas.

This upswell of almost 10,000 concerned citizens has enabled our soldiers to go in and restore normalcy as much as possible to these communities. With our help, the Iraqis are starting to realize that they can establish order and accountability in their lives. But unfortunately, at the same time we've got some who want to see the Iraqi people fail, and we believe there are elements from Iran who are doing whatever they can to undermine our collective efforts.

We see Iranian activity through our area in three levels. First, U.S. soldiers are coming under attack from deadly weapons originating from Iran; specifically, Iranian rockets and Iranian-manufactured components for explosively formed projectiles. Second, we believe some, not all, Shi'a militants are being trained by Iran to use these weapons and then they're passing that training on to others inside of Iraq.

And third, we believe that members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps are facilitating training as well as transfer of weapons and munitions. We assess that there are 50 or so Iranian and Iraqi operatives working for Iran in our area, about 20 of which who we are actively targeting. These operatives fall in the same group that helped militants carry out the January 2007 attack against the Karbala Provincial Joint Coordination Center, resulting in the death of five of our soldiers.

Now, one way or another, Sunni militants are also getting their hand on this Iranian technology. Whether that's a direct hand-off or black-market activity, we don't know, but both sides -- the Sunni extremists and the Shi'a extremists -- have it and are using that technology to kill Americans and Iraqis, and that's got to stop. And we're using every means available as to monitor and take down these networks.

The scale of the Iranian problem is especially troubling when you look at the numbers of weapons we found and destroyed since the start of the surge. We have captured more than 117 Iranian-made munitions since April the 4th. Let me tell you about some specific instances.

Just over two weeks ago, soldiers from our 3rd Brigade Combat Team conducted a raid on a militant house in the town of Nahrawan, which is about 20 miles east of Baghdad on the east side of the Tigris River. They arrested one of our division's most valued targets, high-value targets, and he acted as a link between Iran and the Jaish al- Mahdi militia. He was the main Shi'a conduit in that region for getting Iranian EFPs and rockets into Baghdad, and his capture was a big blow to that network.

When we found him, we also discovered an insurgent video they were making that showed 46 Iranian rockets lined up to be fired at one of our U.S. forward operating bases. In fact, some of those rockets shown in the video actually fired and hit some of our bases on the 11th of July, killed one of my soldiers and wounded 15 others.

Just last weekend Iraqi army scouts recovered a cache of Iranian mines in the Wasat province after receiving a tip from an Iraqi civilian. We believe these mines were meant to kill coalition and Iraqi security forces due to the proximity of this weapons cache to one of our camps.

We are finding Iranian-made munitions and weapons systems throughout our area. But the fact remains we have a 125-mile border with Iran in the Wasat province, and that continues to be a concern.

We are up against a new wave of lethality sponsored by the enemies of the people of Iraq and its government. There have been 48 EFP attacks directed against my troops since the operation began in April, killing eight of my soldiers. We've also seen an increase in the use of precision and rocket attacks, and there have been 66 of those attacks since April, killing five of my soldiers.

There are several significant features associated with the 48 EFPs we found in NMD-C (sic; MND-C) which are unique to Iranian design, manufacture and distribution methods. We're doing things like looking at tool marks on these EFPs and the source of the explosives and the manufacturing capability, and those EFP components are coming to Iran -- coming from Iran into Iraq, and they're killing Iraqis, and they're killing the coalition soldiers.

The good news is that we're having some success in bringing down these networks and countering these weapons' effectiveness. We've found and cleared 728 IEDs, to include EFPs, since the surge began. And in that same period, we've located and destroyed 248 weapons caches.

We're also bolstering the government of Iraq's efforts along the Iranian border. My soldiers are working with the Iraqi border security force, training them and helping them. There is one point of entry into Iraq from the Wasat province -- into the Wasat province, and Iraqi border forces check trucks making that crossing. In the near future, 2,000 Republic of Georgia soldiers will secure six checkpoints, allowing us to thoroughly inspect every truck crossing along the main westbound route towards Baghdad. So every truck that comes into the Wasat province, from Iran into Iraq, will be stopped and searched in total by these great soldiers from Georgia.

In the meantime, we're continuing to take the fight to the enemy throughout our area. On August the 15th, we've launched -- we launched Operation Marne Husky to disrupt extremists who fled our earlier offensive and moved into the Tigris River Valley south of Baghdad. This is an area that hasn't seen coalition troops in over two years. Think about that. And this is a result of the surge.

We did Marne Torch starting on the 15th of June, shifted to Marne Avalanche on the 15th of July, and now we're doing Marne Husky, so the enemy's got no place to hide and he's continuing to be on the run. The area we're fighting in now was an extremist safe haven, and we indeed have the enemy on the run in those areas.

All those previous operations I talked about -- Marne Torch, Marne Avalanche -- drove these bad guys out of areas like Arab Jabour and Iskandariyah. And now we're pursuing them, not letting them resettle and regroup. Because if they don't have the time to breathe, they don't have time to attack the Iraqi people or our troops. This is tactical momentum and it's in our favor. And we're pressing our advantage around Baghdad, and that's a good position to be in.

And that brings me to another topic: the effect of the troop surge in my area of responsibility. As I said before, we assumed this mission about four-and-a-half months ago. My last brigade combat team closed in as

part of the surge into Iraq in early June. Since we arrived, we've been implementing the plan, and what's been accomplished so far has been surprising in its implications.

Residents of former al Qaeda safe havens have flipped to the side with the coalition forces against the enemy. And with the security that's resulted, we've seen the Iraqi people benefit from a window for reconstruction and the growth of local leadership. Overall attacks are down by 26 percent in Multinational Division-Center. Civilian casualties have decreased by 36 percent.

Since the 15th of June, we have killed or captured 16 high-value individuals throughout our battlespace. Removing these leaders not only weakens the enemy network but also keeps pressure on the remaining elements and shows them we will continue to hunt them down if they continue their activities. In addition to that, we have either killed or captured now 1,000 of the enemy insurgents.

In the absence of violence, growth has taken place at the local level. And with the nurturing of the concerned citizens groups, the Iraqi people are helping us consolidate our gains in security by stepping up and taking responsibility for securing their own town. We'll work with the government of Iraq to give it a lasting legitimacy by gradually working these citizens into Iraqi security forces.

This is what's most important. When you talk to the concerned citizens and you ask them what do they want, what they want is recognition. They want to be legitimate members of the Iraqi security forces, and there's momentum in that direction.

There are concerns in some sectors that by encouraging the growth of security at the local level, we are undermining the authority of the Iraqi government. I don't see that to be true at all. Local and provincial leaders are implementing grassroots governance and with our help are improving their lives and the lives and the lives of their citizens by resolving the problems they can solve locally.

And that doesn't weaken the Iraqi government; it strengthens it. Because of this, the will of the people in action, when the politicians in Baghdad actually come together, they're going to find out they got a stable base from which to build on.

So there really is a groundswell of enthusiasm at the local level, 10,000 concerned citizens helping to secure the area. With that security, there is an opportunity for reconstruction, there's an opportunity for mature and local governance, and that's what we're seeing.

That's really the effect of the surge in a nutshell. We're buying time and space for the Iraqi people to come together and determine their future. It's reconciliation from the ground up, by helping the Iraqis see that they have something worth fighting for and protecting.

Some days are better than others, but we continue to make progress. Slowly but surely, we're driving out the bad guys and enabling families and communities to return to normal lives.

Some final thoughts before I take your questions. I'm proud of the contributions our soldiers have made helping Iraqi citizens have a future filled with hope and opportunity and not with oppression and despair. This is not easy and not for certain, but it is possible. And working together, it could all be a reality. Our soldiers continually rise to the occasion, putting their heart and their soul on the line for their brothers in arms and for freedom. Every day, they commit extraordinary acts of valor, and you should be so very proud of them.

Finally, the enemies of Iraq, while having sustained severe loss in the past several months, have not gone away, and I fully expect them to try to launch spectacular attacks that exact a terrible toll on the Iraqi people. We will continue taking the fight to the enemy, and we are proud of the fact that the Iraqis will stop -- we'll be able to work with the Iraqis to stop violence because they now have a high degree of determination and resolve at the

local level. And they're showing magnificent courage. They're showing a will to continue to make their future, a safe future, a reality. If we have faith in them, they will have faith in us and their future.

With that, I'll take any questions y'all have.

COL. KECK: Kristin?

Q Sir, it's Kristin Roberts with Reuters, hoping you can give us some insight into the state of play between the rival Shi'ite factions in your area, how the Iranian influence is playing into that; and second, what information you might have on who is behind the killings of the two governors, the governor of Muthanna and the governor of Diwaniyah. Thank you.

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, thanks for that, Kristin. Well, as you know, my battlespace doesn't include those southern provinces, but I can talk to your first question.

What I'm seeing here is a struggle for power and influence. Some folks believe that all the issues in Iraq are Sunni versus Shi'a and it's the precursor of some kind of civil war. And I don't see that. I see Shi'a-on-Shi'a violence, and that is a struggle for power and influence. And we do see this Iranian influence that's allowing Shi'a extremists more capabilities, in terms of being better trained, in terms of having better equipment and having better munitions. And all that's doing is providing fuel for the fire. The Shi'a extremists are attacking the Iraqi people, they're attacking other Shi'a militants, and it is indeed a struggle for power and influence.

COL. KECK: Barbara?

Q General Lynch, Barbara Starr from CNN. I wanted to ask you to follow up on several of the points you made about Iran. What is your real feeling right now, when you said maybe 50 or so Iranians and Iraqis influenced by Iran, these fighters that you're seeing? How many Iranians do you think are in your area? What do you think they're really doing?

And on the question of weapons, if you're looking at things like factory marks and manufacturing, are you convinced yet that you can tie this back to finished weapons or components coming in with the support of the Iranian government?

It sounds like you're awfully frustrated and concerned about this growth of Iranian influence.

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, thanks for that, Barbara. I am indeed concerned. You know, we are in combat operations against Shi'a extremists, Sunni extremists and marked Iranian influence, and since we've been fighting this fight, since the 4th of April, we've lost 71 magnificent soldiers. They've paid the ultimate sacrifice, so I'm focused on taking out all the enemy. I got bad guys from all flavors. So right now, let's focus is on the Iranian influence.

What I believe in my battlespace is I've got IRGC surrogates, people that have been trained by the IRGC in Iran who've come back in Iraq to conduct acts of violence, and I believe I got some members of the IRGC, some Iranians, who are working in our battlespace. And what they do is they transit the battlespace. They don't come in and they stay, but they're going back and forth. The primary concern, as I say, is the number 50; the good majority of those are IRGC surrogates. They're operatives that have been trained by the IRGC.

Having said that, I do believe that at any given time, I got up to about 20 Iranians working in our battlespace, you know, either training Iraqis to conduct acts of violence or conducting those acts of violence themselves, and we're working detailed targeting on all those people.

And then to your question about the munitions -- I mean, we study all these things. As we come across

IEDs, you know the found-and- cleared IEDs -- we got opportunities to check them for fingerprints, put them under microscopes, and what we're finding is distinct marks that could only be created by machinery and capabilities coming out of Iran. So there's no doubt in my mind when I talk about EFP components being manufactured in Iran and coming into Iraq and then assembled inside of Iraq to attack our soldiers and Iraqi security force soldiers and innocent Iraqis, and that's most troublesome.

And this -- as I talked about the attack on FOB Hammer, there were 46 Iranian rockets lined up with Iranian timers to kill my soldiers out on FOB Hammer. And luckily, a great UAV operator was flying his UAV around, he saw those Iranian rockets, he turned to his leaders and said, "Hey, I think we got this problem." A leader sent ground forces out there, and bigger than Dallas, there's the rockets, and we were able to disconnect those rockets before they fired.

But when you take those rockets and you show them to experts in munitions, EODs -- they look at their documents, they focus on the munitions and say, "Those had to come from Iran." And that has to stop. And that's what I'm trying to do in Wasat province now with the Georgians. We'll set up those checkpoints so when trucks come from Iran into Iraq, we'll search every one of those trucks.

There will be no stone unturned, because if there is a rocket in there, or an EFP component there, we're going to find it before it hurts one of my soldiers.

COL. KECK: Mik.

Q General, Jim Miklaszewski with NBC. After his visit to Iraq last weekend, Senator John Warner said yesterday that he's recommending to the president that the U.S. begin to withdraw its forces from Iraq as early as December. From somebody who's conducting combat operations on the ground there, what's your reaction to that? How do you think that would affect your ability to conduct those operations?

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, thanks for that question, Jim. You know, what I find now -- as you all know, I was in Iraq, went away for 10 months, came back again -- and really the difference that's happening right now is twofold. One is, we're not commuting to work. In my battlespace there are 29 patrol bases that we have occupied, and we're out there with the local citizens. Being out with the local citizens allows us to let them know they're going to be secure, and as a result of that, they come to us with all sorts of actionable intelligence. And that's what happens.

And the other piece is the ability of the surge forces. You know, we now have units; we can take the fight to the enemy. If we were to lose that capability, I believe the enemy would just come back. What I've found studying the enemy is, he's got amazing ability to fill the void. And it takes him about 48 hours. If it's an area that's no longer secure, he's going to fill that void in about 48 hours.

And any of the locals who are helping the coalition secure -- they're now subject to atrocious acts of violence, and we can't let that happen.

This is going to take some time. You know, we've always said the level of coalition forces is a function of three things. It's the level of the insurgency, it's the capability of Iraqi security forces, and it's the capacity of the Iraqi government at the national, provincial and local levels.

And in my battlespace right now, if soldiers were to leave, coalition soldiers were to leave, having fought hard for that terrain, having denied the enemy their sanctuaries, what happens is, the enemy would come back. He'd start building the bombs again, he'd start attacking the locals again, and he'd start exporting that violence into Baghdad, and we would take a giant step backwards.

So in my battlespace, in Multinational Division-Center battlespace, I need the forces I have until I can

transition to sustained security presence by the Iraqi security forces. And that's going to take some time.

COL. KECK: Tom.

Q General, Tom Bowman with NPR. If I could just follow up on that, are you saying that you couldn't reduce any U.S. forces in your sector by Christmas?

GEN. LYNCH: In my battlespace, this is a detailed, complicated operation. You know, when we started operations back in June, there were four enemy sanctuaries, and we fought hard, with major cost of human life, to deny the enemy those sanctuaries. Now we're sitting on those sanctuaries. And only when the Iraqi security forces can come forward and say, "Okay, here I am; I'm trained and equipped, I'm ready, I'm the Iraqi army, I'm the Iraqi police," can I turn those sanctuaries over. And that's not going to happen between now and Christmas.

Q (Off mike) -- anybody, you think, by Christmas. Is that right?

GEN. LYNCH: Not in NMD-C (sic; MND-C), no, not in our area, because the key here is the transition to a sustained security presence. And you got to have an Iraqi security force that's capable of accepting that mission. And we're working through that. I've got some great Iraqi army units in my battlespace, and we're working transitions there. But there's still such a detailed, complicated fight going on that it's no time between now and Christmas to move some coalition forces out.

Having said that, as we work our way into the spring and summer of next year, I see progress. I see the Iraqi security forces coming along. I see their projections. I see their capabilities and I can see how I can transition pieces of my battlespace to the Iraqi security forces and let them be the sustained security presence.

Q General, Jim Mannion from Agence France-Presse.

The National Intelligence Estimate yesterday said that one of the things that's driving both the Shi'a-on-Shi'a violence as well as some of the activities of the neighbors like Iran is the perception that the U.S. is going to be withdrawing soon. Do you agree with that? Is that something that you think is helping to drive this surge in Iranian activity in Iraq?

GEN. LYNCH: I'm not sure about that. I do know I spend all my time out with our soldiers and with the Iraqi people, and I do know that the Iraqi people, they want to have a secure environment. They want to have the same freedoms that we enjoy back in the States and they're okay with us being there. And they'll be okay with an Iraqi security force that's capable being there, and it'll be all right, but that's going to take some time.

Q Could I just follow up on that? Could you talk then about what Iran's motive is in this surge of weapons and training, you know, since the start of the U.S. surge?

GEN. LYNCH: Let's be clear, see, I have no idea who's behind the things coming in my battlespace from Iran. I don't know if it's the Iranian government; I don't know if it's folks working in Iran for whatever purposes. But I believe what they're trying to do is they're trying to create chaos inside of Iraq.

I think that if indeed Iraq were to achieve what it needs to achieve, which is indeed a representative government that respects the human rights of all Iraqis, that is indeed a ally in the war on terror, is indeed a country that's got a security force that can maintain domestic order, I believe they're not going to have the chaos in the region that they'd like to have, and that's probably what's behind all this import of violence into Iraq.

Q Sir, it's Pauline Jelinek with the Associated Press.

Can you talk a little about the program to negotiate with tribal leaders and Sunnis and so on, to get them

to stop fighting coalition forces and eventually link up with the Iraqi security forces? How is that going in your area? I think there was something -- some effort in Abu Ghraib. And how does that fit in with the concerned citizens program, in which you have 10,000 people who aren't linking up with the Iraqi government?

GEN. LYNCH: No, it's really the same thing. You know, what happens -- it goes like this. You go into an area and you secure the area. And then you start reaching out to the locals: the tribal leadership, the local leadership. And what you find is once they're convinced you're going to stay, they say, hey, how can I help? Because they're tired of the violence.

You know, in our battlespace, you know, I talk about 10,000 people. That's Sunnis and Shi'a alike and they're just tired of the violence so they say, how can I help? So they become concerned citizens -- that's what we talk about -- and they're securing areas; they're manning checkpoints. If you were to fly with me over my battlespace, you'd find a lot of checkpoints manned by concerned citizens that are marked by wearing road guard vests. They've got an orange panel by their side to mark them as a legitimate checkpoint and they're trying to secure their local villages.

I'll give you an example. When you fly out to Yusufiya, you see a 80-year-old Iraqi man out there holding a knife, and what he wants to do is protect his village. He's so tired of the violence.

Now what has to happen over time is those 10,000 concerned citizens have to become legitimate members of the Iraqi security force, and that's what they need to do. They need to go to the Iraqi police academy; they need to join the army and go to army training, and that's happening. And in our battlespace right now, about 1,500 of those -- the lists have been provided to the government of Iraq, and there seems to be a welcoming of the idea of making those people Iraqi police or letting them join the Iraqi army.

So I see progress, but right now where we are is about 10,000 concerned citizens manning checkpoints, chasing al Qaeda out of their area and protecting their families.

Q (Off mike) -- before the government, for the government's approval, 1,500 out of 10,000, what's with the others? What sort of state are they in? They don't want to be? The government doesn't want them? You haven't gotten there yet? What's the difference in those numbers?

GEN. LYNCH: Everything here takes time, you know. And I'm not even pretending that the idea of concerned citizens is being welcomed with open arms by the government of Iraq. They're concerned about the idea of these members of the Sunni population becoming members of a security force. There is some concern. But I see progress.

You know, they've got this reconciliation committee they formed at the national level. Dr. Safa, one of the major players in that, the deputy national security adviser, went out into my area, met with some Sunni concerned citizens and talked to what they can do to get those individuals as legitimate members of the Iraqi security forces. I met with the governor of Baghdad the other day. We're going to move out to Arab Jabour and we're going to do the same thing.

But nothing ever happens overnight here, you know. It takes time to work through these delicate, deliberate issues.

COL. KECK: Jennifer.

Q Sir, Jennifer Griffin with Fox News. Who do you think is the biggest threat to your area? Is it al Qaeda in Iraq or is it these Shi'a militias? Which is the biggest danger for your soldiers? And also, what are the markings on these Iranian weapons that you're talking about that link them back to Iran? What are you seeing? What is it that says Iran to you?

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, thanks, Jennifer, for both of those questions. I'll take the second one first. You know, we've got munitions experts, EOD experts, who study these IEDs once they're found and cleared and look very closely at them and look very closely at the rockets themselves. And there are indeed manufacturing marks on these munitions that could only have come from a place like Iran, the only place they could have come. They couldn't have been manufactured here in Iraq. They are being assembled here in Iraq.

And then when they look at the rockets -- and these are brand new rockets. They haven't been here for a while. These are brand-new rockets. And they study the lot numbers and they study the markings on the rockets, and they say these came from Iran. And they say it with 100 percent accuracy. I'm not an expert on studying munitions, but I got people that work for me that are, and they say these came from Iran, and I believe them. That's why I got to stop that move in here.

Back to your question about the biggest threat. You know, right now, Jennifer, it's about half and half. About half the attacks we're experiencing are from Sunni extremists and about half the attacks we're experiencing are from Shi'a extremists, depending on where you are. The two big fights we got in the Tigris River Valley and the Euphrates River Valley are those who are against Sunni extremists, and they're fighting back, and in the middle of my battlespace -- Iskandariyah, Mahmudiyah, Latifiyah -- there's a lot of Shi'a extremism there, as well.

So I couldn't say one or the other. I just got to tell you, we got a lot of bad guys in our battlespace and we're working to kill or capture them all. And as I told you, we've killed or captured about a thousand of them.

And this idea that we've taken down 16 division high-value targets, of that, half of those were Shi'a, Shi'a leaders of Shi'a networks -- EFP networks, rocket networks; we've detained them or captured them or killed them, we have them under custody, now we're doing interrogation.

Q Thanks.

Q This is Lisa Burgess with Stars and Stripes. Can you give me an estimate of what you think the local support among the Shi'as is for the JAM? Do they actually support the JAM or do you think they're intimidated by the JAM, and that's where the support is coming from?

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, Lisa, that's a great question, and I'll give you my answer. You know, what I found in the Sunni areas -- the Sunni population is just so tired of al Qaeda; that's why they're turning now against al Qaeda and becoming part of the solution, not part of the problem.

The same thing is happening in Shi'a areas. We find in Shi'a concerned citizens who are saying enough is enough. I'm tired of the intimidation by Jaish al-Mahdi, I'm tired of the intimidation by the Shi'a militias, and we want to secure our areas. You know, this groundswell of enthusiasm at the local level to me I find to be amazing. Candidly, I never would have predicted that it would have happened as quick as it is. This 10,000 concerned citizens only came up over about the last six weeks. And in the Shi'a areas where the concerned citizens have come forward, they're saying, "Hey, I'm tired of Jaish al-Mahdi, I'm tired of the militia; I want to secure my area."

COL. KECK: Mike, let's make this the last one.

Q General, it's Mike Mount with CNN. Obviously you're in an area that sees a lot of roadside bombs, a lot of EFPs. Have you asked for MRAPs in your area yet? Do you have any in your area? And are you -- are you in any way trying to expedite the arrival of those into your region?

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, Mike, I know the corps has a fielding plan for the MRAPs. They'll come in over

time. I don't have any now, but I know I'm scheduled to get some. And anything we can do to improve the security of our soldiers, we want to do. So I've studied the MRAP. I'm very excited about getting this part of our formation. When they come into theater, I'll get my fair share, and I'm happy about that.

Having said that, the equipment that we have right now, the 1151s, the Bradleys with extra armor, the route-clearance equipment -- those are all working very well and indeed helping our soldiers survive these attacks.

COL. KECK: Well, sir, we appreciate you spending some time with us today, and as traditional, we'd like to give you the opportunity for some parting remarks.

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, it's always my privilege.

I always thank you for what you do. I have a chance to work with your colleagues over here routinely and take them out and about with me. I appreciate their courage and their commitment.

Today we've got General Griffin with us. He's the Army Materiel Command commander. He reenlisted many of my soldiers.

And primarily the biggest thing I'm concerned about, as I study what's going on back home, is there seems to be some concern that the Army's at its breaking point. I tell you, I don't see it. We're all on multiple deployments. We all miss our families terribly. We're all working through difficult issues over here. But everywhere I go, when I visit soldiers at a patrol base, I'm reenlisting the soldier. There's a soldier raising his hand and committing himself to defense of our freedoms.

So I'm not concerned. People say, "Lynch, how do you have so much confidence?" It's easy, because I'm around these magnificent soldiers.

Thanks for all you do. God bless.

COL. KECK: Thank you, sir.

Thank you all.

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