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**Presenter: U.S. Army Commander of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division
Col. Bryan Roberts**

**June 05,
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DoD News Briefing with Col. Bryan Roberts via Teleconference from Iraq at the Pentagon

BRYAN WHITMAN (deputy assistant secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Okay, let's go ahead and get started.

Let me first welcome Colonel Roberts. It's my privilege to introduce to you today, for the first time in this format, Colonel Bryan Roberts -- that's Bryan with a B-R-Y-A-N -- who's the commander of 2nd Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division.

Colonel Roberts, this is Bryan Whitman -- with a Y -- at the Pentagon. Can you hear us okay?

COL. ROBERTS: I certainly can. Thank you very much, Bryan.

MR. WHITMAN: His brigade arrived in Iraq in November of 2006 and operates as part of Multinational Division Baghdad. He's briefing us today from Forward Operating Base Prosperity in Baghdad. And as I indicated, this is our first opportunity to have you in this format, and we welcome you and look forward to a brief operational update in terms of what your brigade is doing and then appreciate the opportunity to ask you a few questions from the Pentagon press corps here.

So with that, let me turn it over to you.

COL. ROBERTS: Okay, Bryan. Thank you very much.

Good afternoon, and thank you very much for taking time from your busy schedules to attend today's press conference. As Bryan mentioned, I'm Colonel Bryan Roberts, commander of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team of the 1st Cavalry Division, currently conducting counterinsurgency operations in central Baghdad, or the Karkh Security District.

I would like to use this opportunity to tell you who we are, what we are doing here in central Baghdad. I especially want to highlight our major operation in the Karkh Security District, which we call the Haifa Street Project.

But let me start with a little background for perspective. In October 2006, the Blackjack Brigade deployed with approximately 4,000 soldiers from Fort Hood, Texas, to Kuwait. In November we assumed responsibility for south central Baghdad, or the Rashid district. One of our major accomplishments in south central Baghdad was the reopening of the Dura market complex, which, as many of you know, continues to thrive today.

We moved from south central Baghdad to central Baghdad, or the Karkh Security District, in January of 2007, shortly before the announcement of the Baghdad security plan. Karkh is comprised of nine neighborhoods and makes up the center of Baghdad. It is home to approximately 250,000 Iraqis, both Sunni and Shi'a, and is mostly urban, with city streets, single-family dwellings and high-rise apartment buildings.

Prior to the war, Karkh was known as one of the most prestigious places to live in Iraq, as it is close to the seat of government, national landmarks such as the Baghdad zoo, the Iraq museum, ministry buildings and luxurious palaces.

By the end of 2006, however, things had badly deteriorated in Karkh, and most notably on Haifa Street, its well-known thoroughfare. Every day insurgents attacked coalition forces and innocent civilians. In January, there were 87 attacks on coalition forces, and 53 murder victims of sectarian violence.

Karkh had become a support base for terrorists and groups ranging from al Qaeda in Iraq to criminal gangs that were able to operate freely. Haifa street was largely abandoned. Its few residents couldn't go out on the streets due to threats of snipers and roving bands of criminals. The residents that did stay in the area only came out at night to scavenge for food and water.

Our brigade, partnered with the 5/2 Iraqi National Police Brigade, began to operate in Karkh in January. After several initial clearing and combat operations, we saw almost an immediate effect on the number of attacks on both civilians and the security forces. As we execute the Baghdad security plan with patrols, checkpoints and establishment of coalition outposts and joint security stations, we have continued to watch as levels of attacks have decreased.

During the month of May, there were 35 attacks in Karkh, a drop of 60 percent from January. Even more impressive is the decrease in sectarian murders -- four in the month of May, down 94 percent from January's 53. With improved security and the drop in violence, we have been able to focus on another of our primary missions, working with local leaders to improve essential services and economic opportunities in central Baghdad.

We have been doing this primarily through the Haifa Street project because we believe that the revitalization of Karkh must begin with this icon, Haifa Street. The goal of the Haifa Street project is to make Haifa Street a safer, cleaner and better place to live. A joint venture between the Neighborhood Advisory Councils, Karkh District Advisory Council, beladiya, amanat and security forces, the Haifa Street project will be a visible sign of progress that all Iraqis can be proud of and other districts can emulate. It is a three-part project consisting of, first of all, projects that demonstrate visible signs of change and a return to normalcy. There are approximately 20 of these projects.

Second is the improvement of essential service networks, and third, the continued coalition and Iraqi security force partnership. We have several projects that demonstrate visible signs of change and a return to normalcy that are currently under way -- removing old posters and graffiti from building walls, repairing curbs and traffic circles, installing solar street lights and cleaning up parks and playgrounds, to name a few.

Additionally, we have removed over 160 abandoned vehicles, making Haifa Street safer and a better place for traffic flow in a busy city.

More cleanup and repair will follow in the months to come. Working with the city management and public works of Karkh, we have also made great strides in projects to improve essential services.

These project focus on improving sewer, water, electricity, trash removal, schools, and medical facilities. So far, we have 77 projects ongoing valued at over \$19 million. The contractors hire most of their workers from the local area and, as a result, there are over 2,500 Karkh citizens recently employed.

All Iraqi citizens deserve a healthy, sanitary and safe environment, and we are dedicated to making this happen in Karkh. In fact, this week we completed the cleaning of all the main and neighborhood sewer lines serving Karkh. Now the system is serving over 250,000 people again. This was not the most glamorous project, but it's one of the most important ones to a functioning city because it is crucial to sanitation and the prevention of disease. In addition, we have contractors working on the Kahramaa water treatment plant, which will ensure all of our residents have clean drinking water.

Part three. Joint security operations continue to happen every day. Karkh is patrolled day and night by both coalition and Iraqi security forces, and checkpoints and Joint Security Stations have been established where Iraqis and Americans are working side by side. We have a great partnership with our Iraqi security force brethren who are making a major contribution to the Baghdad security plan every day.

We're nearly at the end of a 30-day combined clearing and reconnaissance operation of the apartments along Haifa Street to search for illegal weapons and criminals, assess the infrastructure and essential services, determine demographics, and to identify owners, renters and squatters and, of course, determine their needs. This detailed clearing and reconnaissance will provide more accurate demographics of the population and give us a better idea of how we can assist the residents of Haifa Street. The apartments are about 50 percent occupied and need work. They will in the very near future provide a place for thousands of people to live.

We are on the right track here in Karkh, and the continued downward trend in violence is a good indicator of things to come. I think it's very important that the American people understand that Central Baghdad, as with many other areas in Iraq, is getting better every day. Karkh is once again a bustling districts -- cars, horses and donkey-drawn carts, people and markets fill the streets. There is still occasional violence, and we know the enemy is always plotting against us and innocent civilians. But we will maintain a stable and secure environment with Iraqi security forces and improve essential services, economics and governance with the local leaders of Karkh.

This concludes my comments, and I will be happy to answer a few questions. Thank you.

MR. WHITMAN: Well, thank you for that overview. And we'll get started here. And I think we'll let Carl go first today.

Q Colonel, I'm Carl Osgood. I write for Executive Intelligence Review. I'm curious to know to what degree that the progress that you're describing in Karkh is actually dependent in the long term on how progress -- you know, and conditions in the rest of the country, given that from the casualty reports we've been seeing over the last couple of months, progress in the rest of the country is, clearly, uneven.

So I'm just wondering how -- is this progress you're reporting fragile or do you think it's enduring?

COL. ROBERTS: Carl, I think it's very enduring. Karkh is isolated as the center of Baghdad. There is violence going on around Karkh right now that has not affected our success at all. In fact, it is certainly a model for the other security districts to emulate, and I think that this success that we're achieving right now will be long term. It's depending largely on the Iraqi security forces, who have stepped up to the plate and are performing quite nicely. So I don't think it will affect it at all.

Thank you.

Q Sir, this is Pam Hess with UPI. How many joint security stations and combat outposts do you have, and, projecting that into the future to maintain the security level that you have, how many do you think need to be kept?

And would you tell us what you think the difference is in Karkh from other security districts in Baghdad. Why is your work going well there, and what can they learn from you?

COL. ROBERTS: Currently we have two JSSs and two combat outposts, and I think that is about the right number. As time goes on, we may determine that we can eliminate one of the COPs or one of the JSSs, or we may determine that we need to add COPs or JSSs. But right now we have exactly what we think we need to provide a stable and secure environment for the people of Karkh, and the JSSs obviously assist with command and control and give the people a place to come to and to report to if they have situations they want to bring to our attention.

As far as the second part of your question is concerned, I think the reason we have been successful in Karkh is due in large part to the command of General Baha, who is the commander of the 5/2 Iraqi National Police Brigade. He has the right mixture of checkpoints and entry control points established in and around Karkh. He is patrolling 24 hours a day with both the Iraqi army, the national police, the Iraqi police. And all the other security forces that are under his command he has actively involved in the security process -- that, coupled with the Blackjack Brigade, and I think we have a tremendous recipe for success.

MR. WHITMAN: Andrew.

Q Colonel, this is Andrew Gray from Reuters. Can you say how many Iraqi police you have working alongside you? What's the number? And what happens when you go, whenever that is? Will they be able to take this job on themselves, or will they need additional support from U.S. or other coalition forces?

COL. ROBERTS: I don't know the exact number of Iraqi police that we have. We have two Iraqi police stations operating the Karkh Security District. I think that the Iraqi police are certainly capable of stepping up and assuming control of security in the long run, but right now, I think that has taken the right combination of Iraqi police, national police, Iraqi army and coalition forces to maintain the security situation that we have right now. I think it's a little early for provincial control.

MR. WHITMAN: Jim.

Q Sir, I was just wondering if you could -- I'm sorry. This is Jim Garamone from American Forces Press Service. I was just wondering if you could maybe talk a little bit about the state of training for the Iraqi army, the police, and the local police, specifically, in your area, and how that helps or hinders your mission there?

COL. ROBERTS: Well, all of those forces have their own training that is run by the big -- the high level of command, I guess, is the best way to put it. We only do local training based on our assessment of their need, and that's done through the partnership with the battalions that the Iraqi -- coalition force battalions and Iraqi security force battalions are partnered with, as well as the transition teams.

An example is that the national police are brought out of sector, they go to Numaniyah, and they go through the re-bluing process. And then they come back and they're reintroduced into a security district.

MR. WHITMAN: Jennifer.

Q Sir, it's Jennifer Griffin from Fox News. You were talking about General Baha and how he's doing

such a good job in your area and that that makes a difference for why you're doing so well. Are you suggesting that in the other neighborhoods, in the other areas that there are other Iraqi generals who are not doing so well, and is that the reason for the rise of sectarian killings, because we're seeing a rise in sectarian killings in other neighborhoods? Can you give you assessment of what's happening in those other areas and how perhaps the Iraqi forces are not doing so well there?

COL. ROBERTS: No, I certainly wasn't insinuating that at all. What I was literally doing was explaining that I think the success that we're achieving in Karkh is do in large part to the command of General Baha, who is doing a very good job. I don't have a good assessment or feel at all for how my counterparts' partnership units commanders are. I would assume that they are as good or if not better than General Baha. They may have other challenges that they have contend with that I don't. But certainly, the Iraqi security forces and their leadership have risen to the occasion.

Q A follow-up, sir. Is the Iraqi Finance Ministry in your district? And do you have any details on the five British citizens who were kidnapped last week, any details on how the search for them is going?

COL. ROBERTS: Well, first of all, you know, of course I send my condolences to the families of those five individuals. And I know that the search continues. I do not have any feel at all for the progress. I just ask God to make sure that their families are taken care of and to protect and watch over those individuals who are still missing.

Q Is the ministry in your area of control?

COL. ROBERTS: No, it's not. It is not, not in the Karkh Security District.

Q Thank you.

Q Colonel, it's Luis Martinez with ABC News. How would you categorize the state of control in your area in Karkh? Would you call it as being in the retain mode or in the control mode or in the clearing mode?

COL. ROBERTS: We have actually not done the hold, build, clearing in Karkh that you may be familiar with from the other security districts and interviews or visits that you've conducted. We have done some clearing. As I mentioned, we cleared all of the apartments along Haifa Street, a very successful operation, and fortunately we had no resistance at all. We have done some intelligence-driven clearing operations, and we will continue to do that.

I'm not sure that we need to clear every mahala in Karkh. It just may not be necessary. So in some areas, we're in the control; others, we retain, and then still yet there are some areas that we need to clear, based on the intelligence that we're receiving.

MR. WHITMAN: Pam.

Q It's Pam Hess again. Would you give us some demographic information on Karkh, what the ethnic makeup is, how many people live there, the length of Haifa Street, what sort of physical area you're talking about.

And certainly this hasn't come without a cost to you. What has been the American and the Iraqi security force casualties since you began in January?

COL. ROBERTS: There are 250,000 residents in Karkh. It is about 50-50 Sunni-Shi'a, from what I was last told. I have heard that there are perhaps 60 percent Sunni, 40 percent Shi'a, but the most accurate information that we've been able to ascertain is 50-50.

It's about three miles long and a mile and a half or so wide. It runs along the Tigris to the east; into the west, we have the Mansour Security District.

Q Your casualties?

COL. ROBERTS: (Inaudible.) You know, we have lost 28 soldiers from the Blackjack Brigade. None of them, however, have been in the Karkh Security District. I have two battalions that are detached to other units; they have lost soldiers. And under my previous task organization, we lost some soldiers. But we have not lost any while conducting operations in Karkh, and very few Iraqi security force soldiers have given their lives in Karkh as well; I would say no more than five.

Q Would you consider Karkh, then, more permissive than other environments, or is it just a credit to your troopers?

COL. ROBERTS: Well, I would say that first off, I owe a debt of gratitude to our soldiers for the great job that they're doing, as well as the Iraqi security forces and our partnership.

It is permissive, but due in large part to what we're doing there. The operation that was conducted back in January, War Horse Strike Five, certainly ridded the area of foreign fighters that were operating freely here over the last couple of years. The introduction itself of the Baghdad security plan made some of the terrorists, insurgents, militiamen go to ground; others just totally leave. And then the execution of the Baghdad security plan, with numerous detentions, has certainly put an end to the large amount of violence that Karkh has known in the past.

Q One more. Have you seen the forced moving of either the Sunnis or the Shi'ites that we've seen in other of the districts?

COL. ROBERTS: No, I certainly haven't. That has happened in the past, but I haven't seen any of that since we have focused solely on the Karkh security district since January. In fact, what I have seen is a total reverse. We have seen both Sunni and Shi'a come back home to the Karkh security district, and we're seeing a fading of the sectarian fault line. So we hope that that trend continues. We think that bringing people back to the Haifa Street apartments would certainly be a tell-tale sign of whether that is successful. But we're optimistic and we think it's going to be a good road ahead.

MR. WHITMAN: Gordon.

Q Sir, Gordon Lubold from the Christian Science Monitor. You mention here, you know, the decrease in attacks, including IEDs. What would you attribute specifically to the reasons for a reduction of IED attacks in the district?

COL. ROBERTS: Well, we have seen a few IEDs in the southern portion of our sector, in the Qadisiyah area, the area that marries up with Route Jackson and Route Irish, excuse me, but those are minimal. We have not seen any at all in the center of Karkh. I attribute this again to the checkpoints that we have established, and the fact that we have essentially broken the will of the enemy's back.

MR. WHITMAN: Al.

Q Colonel, it's Al Pessin from Voice of America.

We've seen reports in the last couple of days from your colleagues in other neighborhoods saying that they're not in control of as much area as they had expected to be at this point in the security plan. And it seems that they're saying largely the reason is that the Iraqi forces are not retaining the territory, and they've had to go

back and reclear and reclaim some of these areas. So again I would ask, what's different about the Iraqi forces in your area? How's their manning strength? How's their operational capability? And why does the picture you're painting in Karkh seem to differ, not completely but fairly substantially, from what we're hearing from other parts of the city?

COL. ROBERTS: Well, I think that we have the exact right mixture of Iraqi security forces and coalition forces, as it relates to the size of the security district, the demographics and the level of violence that might otherwise exist if we weren't here. And that's really what I attribute to the success right now is, we've got it just about right with regards to those things that I mentioned. I really can't comment on how it compares to other security districts. Those guys, my comrades, my wingmen, they have a tough fight. And they're getting after it, and they're making a difference every day.

Q It's Pam again.

Is there some metric that you have for manpower per square mile with Iraqis and Americans? Is there some -- because you've mentioned several times this mix. I'm wondering if there's a magic number.

COL. ROBERTS: There is a, quote-unquote, "magic number" that is in the counterinsurgency doctrine. We are not necessarily in -- aligned with that magic number. But when you take out the international zone areas that don't need the numbers that the doctrine says, those areas that are built up horizontally versus vertically, I think, it's a wash. And I really think that we have the right number of troops for the terrain that we're asked to be responsible for.

Q Can I get the figures? Colonel, it's Al Pessin again. I had asked about the percentages of Iraqi forces who are actually in place compared to those who are supposed to be there, the manning levels.

COL. ROBERTS: We are about 85 percent strength across the board with our Iraqi security forces. That's all of the Iraqi security forces we have in our sector. A little bit shorter than that with regards to the noncommissioned officers and officers. But at each level, the subordinate leader is stepping up to fill the void. And again, we have this partnership that is working very well for us, and where they need assistance and professional development and skill and task training, we're doing that. And they're getting right back out on the street and performing the duties very, very well.

MR. WHITMAN: Mike.

Q Colonel, it's Mike Mount with CNN. You had mentioned earlier that the Karkh district is a model of kind of the success that you're having, and with some of the other questions about -- or what you were commenting about the right mixture. Are other commanders in Baghdad, you know, coming to you and asking questions or getting suggestions of what they could do better, or are Iraqi commanders doing the same thing? Are you advising them at all on your success in that area?

COL. ROBERTS: Well, Mike, we all share tactics, techniques and procedures. We have a monthly Baghdad commanders conference, which includes both coalition forces and Iraqi security forces. We learn from each other. I have used techniques from all of the brigade combat teams in our area. So, you now, I'm sure that they are looking at the success of the Karkh Security District, as I looked at some of their successes in order to establish what we have now in Karkh. But by and large the areas are totally different and they have a different problem set. And so, you know, they're working on their problem set, and where they can learn from me, I'm sure they are, and vice versa.

Q Do you have a ballpark on the --

MR. WHITMAN: Go ahead.

Q Thank you! It's Pam again. Can you give us a ballpark on the number of Iraqi security forces that are in Karkh? I take it you've got about 3,000 Americans there?

COL. ROBERTS: Pam, I'm going to have to get back with you on the answer to that question. It's a tough one.

I would say on average it's about 1,800, but again, I have to find that number for you off-line. It's a brigade that consists of three battalions.

MR. WHITMAN: One more -- (off mike).

Q Sir, can you just paint -- but Haifa Street was really bad in early January or just before that. Who was causing most of the trouble there? Was it all foreign fighters or were there other factors? How would you paint just how bad it was and how it turned around and how quickly it turned around?

COL. ROBERTS: Well, there were a number of different actors, and I think they all worked together or against each other, but had the same affect on the population. There were militia, terrorists, insurgents, gangs. It sort of fed off each other. It was a tit-for-tat-type relationship.

Again, as I described in January on the 8th, we did Warhorse strike five. It was very, very successful at detaining a large number of individuals that were responsible for, we think, leading the acts of violence against the populace. And then the introduction of the Baghdad security plan, the execution of the Baghdad security plan on 14 February has just yielded the good situation that we happen to have right now.

We often scratch our heads and say, how did this happen, ask ourselves how it happened, but you know, a certain degree of it may just be luck. But luck is obviously when opportunity meets preparation, and I think we have risen to the occasion.

MR. WHITMAN: Well, Colonel Roberts, we have reached the end of our allocated time here, and it is getting late in your day. And I'm sure it's been a full day for you.

But before we bring it to an end, let me just turn it back to you in case you have any final comments that you'd like to make.

COL. ROBERTS: I certainly wanted to thank the Pentagon press corps for taking time out of your busy schedules; again, I know that there's a lot of news for you to cover. I know you just did an Afghanistan press conference, so you're feverishly working the file. But you all listening to what we have to say over here from Baghdad and Iraq makes a big difference because we want the American populace, all those who support us to know that things are going better over here than they often hear, and there are success stories every day, both from coalition forces and Iraqi security forces.

I'd like to publicly thank our soldiers because they're doing a great job. Every day they give 100 percent, and they're making life better for the citizens of the Karkh Security District. And of course, I'd be remiss if I didn't thank the people back at Fort Hood for all of the support they give our families and soldiers.

So thank you very much for having me, and I look forward to the next time.

Q Thank you.

MR. WHITMAN: The pleasure has been ours. We wish you continued success and hope to hear from you again real soon.

COL. ROBERTS: As they say in Iraq, insha'Allah. Thank you.

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