



**U.S. Department of Defense**  
Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs)  
**News Transcript**

**On the Web:**

<http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4039>

Media contact: +1 (703) 697-5131/697-5132

**Public contact:**

<http://www.defenselink.mil/faq/comment.html>  
or +1 (703) 428-0711 +1

---

**Presenter: Army Commander, Multinational Division Baghdad and 1st Cavalry Maj. Gen. Joseph Fil**

**September 21, 2007**

---

**DoD News Briefing with Maj. Gen. Joseph Fil at the Pentagon, Arlington, Va.**

BRYAN WHITMAN (deputy assistant secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Well, good morning. Good afternoon, General Fil. This is Bryan Whitman at the Pentagon. How are you this afternoon?

GEN. FIL: Hello. This is General Fil. Would you say again, please.

MR. WHITMAN: Sure. Welcome and thank you for joining us. This is Bryan Whitman at the Pentagon, with the Pentagon press here. We appreciate you taking your time this morning to be with us again. I think this is your third time with us in this format.

Major General Joseph Fil is the commanding general of Multinational Division Baghdad, as well as 1st Cavalry Division. He's speaking to us today from Camp Liberty in Baghdad, where he and his -- he assumed responsibilities for operations there in November of 2006, I believe. And he's going to give us a brief operational update and take some of your questions.

So, General, again, thanks for being with us.

GEN. FIL: Well, Bryan, thank you very much for that kind introduction. And thank you all for attending today's update.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide some current information to you on our operations here in Baghdad. Baghdad, as many of you who have been here know firsthand, it's a mosaic of progress and violence, of accomplishments and frustration, of transition and history, of brave and courageous people, and violent thugs, ethnic harmony and sectarianism, all rolled into one.

So it's important to me as the commander of the Coalition Force Division here in Baghdad to keep you updated on the trends and the progress that we're seeing and to tell you about the tremendous work that the sons and daughters of America and our Iraqi security force partners are doing here.

As General Petraeus mentioned in his recent address to Congress, we've made significant progress on the security front since the troop surge began earlier this year. The Baghdad neighborhoods where our forces are located are safer than they have been in a very long time, and our Iraqi security force partners have made great

strides as well. We've had some tough days battling al Qaeda and criminal militia, but here in the Multinational Division Baghdad we keep pounding away at our enemy, pushing him daily, and we've seen positive results from our persistent pressure.

The people of Baghdad have grown tired of the violence brought on by terrorist groups and criminal militiamen. They've started banding together in the neighborhoods on both sides of the Tigris River to reconcile themselves to the duly elected Iraqi government and to put an end to the senseless violence and lawlessness. They're volunteering to work with the government, instead of against it, for the betterment of all.

And across the Iraqi capital, reconciliation efforts, led by our soldiers and leaders and the grassroots level, are starting to bear fruit. There are currently almost 8,000 Iraqi security volunteers employed in various just across the city. These volunteers are predominantly young men who have emerged from areas previously dominated by al Qaeda and other resistance groups.

Yesterday over 700 of these volunteers graduated from the Baghdad Police College, and next week 800 more will graduate from training at a facility near Abu Ghraib and enter into the Iraqi police service. Now, these brave volunteers are seeking to help rout out al Qaeda and criminal militias and to enter a career in law enforcement to make an honest living.

In many areas in around Baghdad, these volunteers are being integrated with, trained -- integrated with and trained by Iraqi security forces on checkpoints, and in many cases they're conducting coordinated operations side by side with them. And we're seeing very positive impacts on local security where this partnership occurs.

These partnerships are yet another step forward in the effort to bring down the levels of violence and to protect the population by involving the population. Attacks are down in the city. The temporary barriers we've (emplaced ?) around markets and the densely populated areas have caused the terrorist attacks to be less lethal over the past months and allowed life to grow inside the barriers. Baghdad currently has the lowest level of attacks within the 10 security districts since we first arrived here more than 10 months ago.

Since Fard al-Qanun began back in mid-February, there's been more than a 50 percent reduction in overall attacks per week. Small arms fire attacks are half of what they were in February. The number of car bombs per week is well under half of when this operation began, and the ones that do detonate are much much less lethal than they were initially. Likewise, mortar and rocket attacks have declined by way more than 50 percent in the same period. We've also seen a steep overall decline in the number of IED detonations and a corresponding increase in the number found prior to detonation. I believe that these trends indicate that our arrests of key IED cell members, combined with an increased ability to find IED caches, is having an overall impact on the enemy's ability to build and use these murderous weapons of terror.

Now, while attack trends are down over all, the level of violence is still too high. We're still seeing attacks against the population and our forces despite recent calls for a stand-down. Our reports show that during the first two weeks of September, extremist groups conducted mortar, rocket and EFP attacks, RPG attacks against tanks and surface-to-air missile launches.

These attacks occurred throughout Baghdad, but were most concentrated in the New Baghdad and West Rashid security districts, where criminal militias continue to be the primary cause of instability in those areas.

The assaults and attacks continue despite Muqtada al-Sadr's word of honor to halt these attacks. And while we continue to show restraint in dealing with those who honor his pledge, we will not show that restraint in dealing with the criminal militia elements who are armed and funded, we believe, by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Qods Force and who attack Iraqi citizens and our forces.

The condition of the central services throughout the city ranges from very good to very poor. Brigade

combat teams with their embedded Provincial Reconstruction Teams continue to work with local government officials and the government of Iraq on a variety of projects, including water, sewer, electricity and even trash collection to improve the quality of life here. The brigade combat teams also monitor and are assisting with fuel distribution to prevent criminal militias from interfering with or attempting to profit from fuel sales. And fuel is critical here in Baghdad, not just to vehicles, but also to the privately-owned generators, which are used by citizens during those times when the national security grid -- or electricity grid, excuse me, isn't providing enough power.

There is much work ahead, but what I see here in Baghdad is steady progress. As the population senses a change in their security for the better and a change in local conditions, they are becoming more and more involved in both aspects in their communities. And that progress is a testament to our soldiers, to the Iraqi security forces and to the government of Iraq and the citizens of Baghdad, and they've all taken courageous steps forward and committed to taking a stand here against terror and against those who intimidate and murder.

Now with that, I'd be very happy to take your questions.

MR. WHITMAN: Well, thank you, General.

Let's start with Bob here.

Q General, Bob Burns with AP. I'd like to ask you about the Iraqi army.

The brigades that are in Baghdad, are they still rotating in from other parts of the country on a regular basis? And are they coming in fully trained and ready, fully manned as well? What's their effectiveness now?

GEN. FIL: Yeah, thank you.

There has been some rotation of troops, although the ones that we have currently in Baghdad have been stable for the past several months. And with -- for the army, I expect them to remain so. There is still some rotation of the national police brigades as we send them to Numaniyah, bring them back out again and rotate them, but for the army they've been -- they'll be fairly stable.

In answer to the question of are they -- how is their training and their readiness, they continue to show improvement. The Iraqi army forces that are here are now, most of them, several into months this -- this fight, and again they are, I think, doing well. They're certainly value added to the fight. And again, they're showing improvement every day, as are their leaders as they gain experience as well, and as they work more and more closely with not only the Iraqi partners that they have in the national police and in the local police, but in fact with their coalition partners as well.

MR. WHITMAN: Okay, Bob.

Q General, Bob Burns again. Just a follow-up question. You mentioned the national police, which was the subject of a recent report, as you know, the Jones commission report, which recommended that they be essentially disbanded and reorganized or remissioned. I'm wondering what your view is on whether that national police force is a salvageable one.

GEN. FIL: I can tell you that from my perspective here in Baghdad, we consider the national police value added. They are making a contribution. They do run the gamut from those still in need of training, still low in the readiness level, to some who are, I think, very high on the readiness level. Those who are low, again, are soon to be headed to Numaniyah, where they go through a reblueing process for four weeks. And generally when they come out of that, they are better off.

I believe that the Iraqi nation has invested four years in this force now, and they are, again, making a contribution. Where they go in the future is a topic that the Iraqis are working very hard on. And they're with the -- the minister of Interior and the minister of Defense are working with this question. In fact, there's a commission that's been established to look at the best way forward for this force.

So I'd -- you know, my belief is that there are some changes that can be made, that must be made to make them more effective, but as far as their overall value to the fight here in Baghdad, they're absolutely value added.

Q General, hi. It's David Cloud with The New York Times. In the past in speaking to us you've given us a breakdown of your assessment of the Baghdad neighborhoods and whether they're cleared, held, retained -- and there's one more category which escapes me at the moment. Can you run through that again with us, or what the status of those are now, and just give us a sense of your rough timetable for moving into the latter categories?

GEN. FIL: Yeah, thanks. I can, and I'll just run through them. The the four categories that we track as we progress through the evolution of security in the city is, first of all, disruption, then clearance, followed by a control phase, and then finally, retain, which is the one in which Iraqi security forces are primarily in the lead.

We started off with 70 percent of them in disruption, and about 21 percent of them in clearance last February. We're now down to about 16 percent in disruption and about 30 percent that remain in clearance. But the number in control and retain now are, of the 474 muhallas in Baghdad, well over 250 of them are in control and retain, some 56 percent.

We are at a point where we've been working very hard in the south of Baghdad, so in general there continues to be progress there. Again, we're in a very tough fight down in east Rashid, in the southern portion of Baghdad. That has been very successful recently, although it's been a long, tough fight. We have reduced al Qaeda down to where they are dug in in several neighborhoods. And that fight continues, and I expect areas of both west and east Rashid to transition from the clearance phase to the control phase as this force is reduced down to this relatively small pocket and as the security forces down there are strengthened and we actually go into the next phase.

So I would expect that, you know, in the next several months, we would continue this progress and would be well over the 56 percent or so that we're at right now, and control and retain.

If you look at a map of Baghdad, you'll see that the eastern portion of the city, which we call Rusafa, is almost exclusively in these two phases. The western part of the city, normally known as Karkh, is the area in which we continue to have the clearance operations for the most part. And then there are some areas in the northern part of the city where we are still into disruption. And again, as we're successful down here in the South, our force will move out to these other areas to take advantage of the forces that we do have during the surge, and move from disruption to clearance to control.

Q In the past, you've had to reclear some areas. This is early on in the surge, maybe before you had your full force in place. Is that problem -- does that problem still exist? Are you having to reclear areas that you've gone through with the stryker brigades in the past?

GEN. FIL: It has not recently although it certainly could. And this is -- it's dynamic. And there -- because we have gone through an area and cleared it, if sufficient security forces don't remain there, there's always a chance that militias and al Qaeda can come back in again and gain a foothold. And that is actually why we've had such a very long, tough fight down in Rashid, to the southern side of the city, because we're refusing to allow either of these extremes to come back into the city, as we not only fight them and eliminate them from this area but also establish the security forces down there to keep them out.

Q General, this is Anna Mulrine with U.S. News and World Report.

I'm just wondering, what do you feel like is the toughest part of what you're doing in Baghdad today? What's your biggest challenge right now in the city?

GEN. FIL: I'm sorry, would you repeat the question, please?

Q I'm just wondering what your -- what you feel like your biggest challenge in the city right now is. What's the toughest thing you're facing in Baghdad right now?

GEN. FIL: It continues to be the IEDs that are the -- really the biggest threat to our soldiers. They're the biggest killer. It's a very tough weapon to find because there are many ways to disguise them, even putting them into concrete and simulating the curb from the side of the road. So we're working very hard against these, not only against them when we find them, but against the networks that are putting them in there and those networks that supply them. So that continues to be the main effort, frankly, offensively.

And I do think we've had, you know, huge progress. The numbers of these IEDs continue to come down and their effectiveness, and now we're finding many more of them than are actually being used against us. But it's still a challenge, and it's the number one killer of soldiers over here.

MR. WHITMAN: Julian.

Q General, Julian Barnes from the Los Angeles Times here. I was wondering if you could tell us about the willingness of local police to move against militias in their neighborhood, particularly these local volunteers that you spoke of. Are they willing to take actions against entrenched militias?

GEN. FIL: They've been -- well, first of all, these forces -- we're not using them offensively, and so they are -- right now they are to serve as security volunteers, and they are helping us to keep people out and to serve -- the militias out and to serve as an early warning network in coordination with the police and the coalition forces and the Iraqi army forces that are in these neighborhoods. But we are not right now using them offensively to actually fight against al Qaeda or militias in the cities.

And to answer your question, are they willing to? Yes, they are, and they want to. And as they are eventually incorporated into the Iraqi security forces, whether it be the police, the Iraqi, you know, Police Service, the national police or the Iraqi army, we'll certainly use them that way.

And we are currently in the process of, as I mentioned earlier, of training them. And right now there are almost 8,000 of these volunteers in the greater Baghdad area who have signed up to join the security forces. And as we go through the process of vetting them, of ensuring that they are in fact the right kind of soldiers, policemen -- national policemen that the nation needs, they'll indeed be incorporated.

But right now they're providing a huge amount of help in identifying cells, giving us tips as to their location, intelligence as to when they're starting to enter the areas, and providing early warning.

Q If I could follow up. You talked about bringing more Iraqi security forces, strengthening those. Do you anticipate, as the battlefield geometry changes and units are not needed from other parts of Iraq, that you would request more U.S. forces be brought into Baghdad to help with the security there? Is that something that you would see as desirable?

GEN. FIL: Well, of course no division commander ever is satisfied that he has enough forces, and we do believe in overwhelming combat power. And in this theater, combat power is certainly measured by boots on the

ground. But at this point I do not have plans to ask for more soldiers. I feel that the soldiers that we have here are adequate for the job. We're being very successful in moving the city through these phases, as I said. Security is certainly on the rise in the city. The level of violence is way, way down. And perhaps more significantly, the ability of the Iraqi security forces to control their own neighborhoods, their own areas as they stand side by side with American forces and, in fact, as they take the lead is growing.

So at this point I don't foresee that. What I do see is that as we become -- as the areas become into the retain phase and we're able to move our soldiers gradually away from these areas, that we would go into the areas in the city where we have not had coalition presence and where we've remained in the retain areas -- or in the disrupt areas, up to the northwest, to the far east of the city.

Q General Fil, this is Jamie McIntyre with CNN. I think when you were giving us the breakdown before, you sort of lumped the control and retain figures together.

I'm just curious if you could break out for us how many neighborhoods are actually really under Iraqi control in that last category of retained.

GEN. FIL: It is -- currently, it's -- to be precise, it's 46 percent in control and 8.2 percent in retain of the 474 muhallas that we have here in Baghdad.

Q And just one other question about -- you mentioned the IED threat -- IED threats. I'm just curious how many of the MRAPs, the Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles, you have, how many more you need, and do you think they make a difference -- a big difference in the U.S. casualty rate in your area of responsibility?

GEN. FIL: We have not -- although we have RC-31s and some of the route clearance equipment that we've had, you know, for some time here, and it's very effective, we in the 1st Cavalry Division, Multinational Division-Baghdad have not yet received the MRAPs. We do expect to be getting it shortly, and one of our districts is a priority for General Odierno and the allocation of these. And so we do expect to be receiving them shortly.

I think they're going to be hugely effective, frankly, and they're, you know, specifically designed for the threats that we currently face here and for the threat that we believe we'll be facing for the foreseeable future here in Baghdad and in Iraq, and that is these deep-buried IEDs and the IEDs that -- with the shape charges, the EFPs, that are just so very lethal.

So I believe they're going to be hugely effective, and I think that the accelerated program upon which we've embarked to get them here as quickly as we can will be very helpful to protecting soldiers and making us more effective.

Q Can you tell us which district is a priority? You've mentioned --

GEN. FIL: (Inaudible.)

Q Thank you. General, could you mention which district is the priority? You've mentioned that Odierno has targeted one particular district.

GEN. FIL: He is -- General Odierno has looked at the entire nation, and he has -- based on the different brigade combat teams across Iraq, and the threat that they have faced, he's prioritized them and then made the allocations according to that prioritization.

I don't think it's helpful at this point to go into the details of that, except to say that we division commanders are all in full agreement with him that it's a very logical way to apportion them and that the way they're coming out, a brigade combat team at a time, will be very helpful for us to be able to ensure that we get

the training package ready, the maintenance package ready, and we employ them as a force, rather than putting them out one by one by one.

So we're satisfied that it's the right way to get them distributed here. And again, they're coming fast.

Q General, it's Al Pessin from Voice of America. You indicated how you're trying to move the neighborhoods through these four phases, currently only 8.2 percent under full Iraqi control. Based on the Iraqi forces available to you, how much of the city can they maintain on their own? Or will you need more Iraqi forces to eventually turn over the entire city?

GEN. FIL: Again, this is dynamic, and 8.2 percent is where we stand today. This -- these numbers will change as we go through the fall and winter here.

The -- are the Iraqi security forces -- the fundamental question: Are the Iraqi security forces sufficient to truly protect the city? I do not believe they are. And that is why the government of Iraq has determined that we need to increase those forces. And the police forces alone will increase by more than 12,000, over time. And that's why this very important initiative, through reconciliation, to bring in all of these willing young men who want to be part of the solution, instead of part of the problem, is so very important and so very timely.

And I do think that, again, given the progress that they have, the numbers that are coming, this retention figure will -- it will indeed increase as we go through the year.

I would like to say, though, that the definition of retention is not that the Iraqi forces are exclusively controlling an area. It's an area where they have the lead and in which we're in more of an overwatch role.

Q Just to follow up, can you give us some sense, and I realize it's dynamic, and you're trying to bring in these volunteers. But can you give us some sense based on the Iraqi force that you have now as to how much of this city they could take the lead in in a retain phase?

GEN. FIL: Well, that of course depends on not only their numbers but also their experience, their ability, their capability. And that's most significantly the enemy threat. And again that is one in which we're working very, very hard right now, to reduce not only al Qaeda in the city -- and frankly that -- I think we're having a lot of success there; they're deeply disrupted -- but also the militias that are here in the city and their influence. And as they are reduced and put under control, I think there will be large portions of the city that will go into control fairly quickly and then ultimately into retain. It is not possible now, because of those dynamics that I mentioned, to make an exact prediction of how many that we could currently move to, because the enemy gets a vote in this as well.

Q General, how can U.S. and coalition troops retain most of Baghdad after the troop levels draw down to pre-surge levels?

GEN. FIL: What these -- what the surge has allowed us to do, the surge of coalition forces has allowed us to do in Baghdad is to go to not only hold areas that we've been working very hard in, to control them, but to go into areas that we were frankly not in any strength in before and get them cleared and then build up the security forces so they can move into control. And so I would expect by the time we begin this reduction of security forces from the surge, which is about two-and-a-half brigades worth of soldiers if you add up all the battalion equivalents here in the Baghdad area, that we'll be well past the time when we needed them to do this expansion.

So I feel that, you know, frankly, the timing of the surge was probably optimal. I'll also say that having troops here for the 15 months that we've had them has also been very helpful, not only for our forces, the 1st Cavalry Division and the forces that we started with, but for the surge forces who were coming through as well.

So I'm confident that the timing on it is appropriate and that as these forces begin to draw down, the security forces -- the Iraqi security forces will be sufficiently strong, that they'll be able to take these regions from control and into retain.

I do expect, though, also that, you know, by the time the surge is -- starts to be reduced, that we'll still have some areas in Baghdad that are probably still under clear, and there may even be some that are under disrupt.

Sadr City, for example, is an area in which we do not have extensive forces right now; we have one corner of it. We have a number of initiatives that we're working with them, but we do not plan to actually move into Sadr City for several months, and that will be done as we work with the local government there and the government of Iraq.

MR. WHITMAN: General, we have reached the end of our time, unfortunately, but we do appreciate you taking the time today and for making your subordinate brigade commanders available to us in this format, too.

Before we bring it to a close, though, let me just turn it back to you in case there's something that we've missed that you'd like to highlight before we do close it.

GEN. FIL: Okay. Well, Bryan, thanks again very much. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss our situation here in Baghdad. And as usual, the time is much too short.

I would like to say that from my perspective, there are certainly positive trends ongoing and emerging here. And while our occurring forces and our operations, our targeted raids that continue to keep al Qaeda operatives and criminal militiamen on the run, the trend is that -- that is most encouraging to me is the grassroots reconciliation that we're seeing throughout the capital and around the city. And I believe this shift with the population stepping forward has every potential to become the catalyst that brings truly enduring change for the better, certainly here in Baghdad and perhaps across the nation. And I really sense the momentum on both streets -- on both sides of the river in Baghdad and on the streets when we're working with the most senior Iraqi officials that I deal with.

The Iraqi people are tired of senseless violence, and they're standing up in their communities. They're volunteering to defend their own homes and neighborhoods. And they're reconciling with the government of Iraq to work with it, instead of against it, to produce change.

Our soldiers here are truly making a huge difference. And I'd ask that you all continue to acknowledge their noble service and keep all of them and their families in your thoughts, in your prayers, as we continue to help Iraq move forward.

And again, I thank you very much for your time and your attention today. It's been my pleasure to speak with you again. First Team!

MR. WHITMAN: Well, thank you, General. We look forward to hearing from you again soon.

GEN. FIL: It'll be my pleasure.

(C) COPYRIGHT 2007, FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC., 1000 VERMONT AVE. NW; 5TH FLOOR; WASHINGTON, DC - 20005, USA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. ANY REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION IS EXPRESSLY PROHIBITED.

UNAUTHORIZED REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION

CONSTITUTES A MISAPPROPRIATION UNDER APPLICABLE UNFAIR COMPETITION LAW, AND FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC. RESERVES THE RIGHT TO PURSUE ALL REMEDIES AVAILABLE TO IT IN RESPECT TO SUCH MISAPPROPRIATION.

FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC. IS A PRIVATE FIRM AND IS NOT AFFILIATED WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. NO COPYRIGHT IS CLAIMED AS TO ANY PART OF THE ORIGINAL WORK PREPARED BY A UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT OFFICER OR EMPLOYEE AS PART OF THAT PERSON'S OFFICIAL DUTIES.

FOR INFORMATION ON SUBSCRIBING TO FNS, PLEASE CALL JACK GRAEME AT 202-347-1400.