



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=3926>

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

Public contact:

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

Presenter: Commander, 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, Col. Paul Funk

April 06, 2007 9:00 AM EDT

DoD News Briefing with Col. Funk from Iraq

(Note: Colonel Funk appears via teleconference from Iraq.)

COL. GARY KECK (director, Department of Defense Press Office): All right. Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the Pentagon briefing room. I'm Colonel Gary Keck, the director of the Press Office, it's my privilege today to introduce you to our briefer, who is Colonel Paul Funk, commander of the 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, the Ironhorse Brigade. He wanted to make sure that I pointed that out to you.

Colonel Funk's brigade arrived in Iraq in November 2006 and operates in the -- as part of Multinational Division Baghdad. He's coming to us today from Camp Taji, which is northwest of Baghdad. And this is a first-time opportunity to brief the Pentagon press corps, so be kind. He's going to give us an operational update, and then I'm sure he'll take some questions.

Paul, I want to thank you taking time out with us today. And with that, I'd like to turn it over to you for some opening comments.

COL. FUNK: Good morning. Let me begin by telling you a little bit about my unit and the area in which we operate.

The 1st Ironhorse Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, deployed from Fort Hood, Texas, in November of last year. We are an enhanced brigade, and our attachments include the 137 Field Artillery from the 3rd Brigade of the 2nd Infantry Division. That brings the total number of troopers in the brigade to about 3,800.

Our operational environment is in the northern portion of the Baghdad province. It consists of 900 square miles and is the largest brigade area in the Multinational Division Baghdad. It is roughly 15 times the size of a brigade area inside the Baghdad security belt.

This is primarily a rural area, with about 160 population centers and a total population nearing 2 million. Our operating environment runs from Tarmia in the north, which is 27 miles north of Sadr City, to Abu Ghraib in the south, from Saba al-Bor in the west to Husainiyah in the east.

In terms of ethnic composition, the majority of our operating environment is Sunni. The primary line of demarcation is the Tigris River, with the Sunnis in the west and the Shi'a in the east.

Our brigade's mandate is to provide a safe, secure and stable environment, working in a professional manner, together with the Iraqi security forces, in the best interests of the Iraqi people.

Using this as a backdrop, we have developed a campaign plan working along six lines of operation: security, transition, economic, essential services, communications and governance. Each one of these is essential, and all are equally important to the success of our operation.

However, it is my belief that our long-term success will be the direct result of our efforts along the security and governance lines of operation. Security in our operating environment is assessed as moderate and holding steady. The number of extrajudicial killings has decreased since our arrival. Most of the extremist acts are conducted by a finite number of individuals, and it is not prevalent throughout the population. We're having increasing success with eliminating the number of IEDs along the roadways. However, the movement of the insurgent personnel, weapons and equipment through our area continues to be an issue. To eliminate these threats, we are targeting critical leadership nodes and having success destroying the insurgent networks.

Decisive to the security is our ability to maintain freedom of movement throughout our operating environment. This is accomplished by conducting near-simultaneous operations across the area, using ground- and air-based platforms designed to prevent enemy influence on our operations in support of Operation Fard al-Qanun.

I have three goals for the security in our operating environment.

First, we want to disarm extremism in whatever form it may present itself in our sector.

Second, we want to maintain freedom of maneuver throughout our operating environment.

Lastly, we want to marginalize the insurgents in order to drive a wedge between the insurgents and the population. This last effect will only be achieved by increasing the capacity of the local government, in conjunction with the abilities of the Iraqi army and police, to provide the appropriate levels of security to enable good governance, economic development and essential services for the needs of the populace.

The brigade's ability to transition the security mission to the Iraqi security forces increases daily, as the Iraqi army and police strengthen their resolve to continue the fight to fight the terrorists and their affiliated groups. The challenges include leadership, training, equipment, accountability and responsibility. Our transition efforts with the Iraqi army will be based on our ability to assess the capabilities of the ISF in these areas and build relationships with our Iraqi counterparts that allow us to ensure the capable leadership that is present and enduring.

The key to this counterpart relationship is our partnering of one U.S. company to each Iraqi army battalion. Let me break that down for you in terms of force ratio by highlighting the number of U.S. soldiers assigned in an advisory role to the Iraqi army.

Prior to our arrival, just one U.S. soldier was assigned to an advisory role for every 70 Iraqi army soldiers. By partnering U.S. companies to Iraqi army battalions, we have achieved a force ratio of one U.S. soldier to every 14 Iraqi army soldiers. This is additionally significant because we have placed our best and brightest soldiers in these advisory roles, in large part because we believe that this is the best solution to develop lasting capabilities in terms of training, leadership and accountability. We in essence are training the Iraqi army as we fight, ensuring that we develop leaders capable of training, equipping and fighting their organizations.

Currently there remains a significant shortfall in the abilities of the Iraqi police forces in the areas of leadership, personnel, training and equipment in my area. Equipment shortages are not the main concern for the

station but rather a lack of proper accountability and responsibility, assistance for personnel, equipment accountability, as well as general station operations and maintenance are much greater issues.

The entire Ministry of Interior, or MOI system, continues to struggle concerning logistics, resupply and personnel administration outside the security district. These struggles limit the ability of the Iraqi police to become a better and more competent professional security force. The concept of the IP transition way ahead is to continue to focus the emphasis of police transition teams on critical locations and tactical focus areas within our area.

In these critical locations, PTTs focus their efforts on community policing through dismounted patrols as well as embedding IPs in the surrounding community. We will continue to build joint security stations as a way ahead to allow IA, IP and coalition forces to fuse operations and intelligence functions at the local level. The five JSSs in our area have been very successful and we continue to improve their functionality and capability.

Economic development in our sector is experiencing challenges as Iraq rebuilds. The largest industry in our sector is agriculture, and it makes up about 40 percent of the local economy, with the remainder of the economy consisting of the state-owned enterprise sector and small businesses made up predominantly of vendor stands at local markets and roadways. Our role in economic development is focused on influencing those sectors that are within the capabilities of my brigade to affect. These initiatives consist of programs such as the microfinance loans, microgrants, and the establishment of a vocational and technical education program. But the predominant focus of my brigade, however, is on building local government capacity that will provide enduring capability of sustained economic growth and government stability.

Projects to improve the distribution of essential services for the people are under way, with a focus on transitioning the management of these essential services to the local government. The brigade is currently managing 86 reconstruction projects that cover all aspects of essential services, to include sewer, water, electricity, trash, health and education projects. These projects are small and are meant to provide temporary relief as the government of Iraq grows its capacity to provide these services to its population.

Our communications focus lies in two areas -- keeping the soldiers and their families informed with the most current information concerning operations here, and informing the local Iraqi populace. To communicate to home fronts, we host monthly video teleconferences with families, produce monthly news letters and provide soldiers with access to e-mail and phones. We are currently planning on providing live video coverage of the graduation ceremonies of the Fort Hood area schools so that soldiers can watch their sons and daughters graduate. We remain extremely proud of the determined and superb efforts of our family readiness groups and the rear detachments continue to provide.

We're working to keep the local Iraqi populace informed through their local government. We are currently working with the local qadhas, nahiyas and councils to build the capacity to inform the local populace concerning issues that pertain to their area. Our goal is to have the minutes from the governmental meetings posted in the local newspaper and distributed at government facilities to ensure the populace is informed of what their local government is doing for them.

Our government development campaign plan is based on building local government capacity within three branches that make up the qadha government. These branches of local government are the executive, consisting of the mayor or the qaimaqam; the council, consisting of elected representatives from the qadhas; and the technical branch, which is responsible for the provision of essential services to the local populace.

Our government development efforts involve an aggressive campaign in partnership with USAID and the U.S. State Department that involves a series of governmental development conferences between the qadhas and the province, USAID-sponsored public administration training programs, and the use of funds available to the brigade for reconstruction projects and programs.

The government development conferences are an initiative that was started in partnership with the Baghdad PRT and are meant to address the lack of coordination between the qadhas and the provincial government. We have held two conferences to date, and a third is scheduled to take place this month.

This upcoming meeting will focus on the ministry's support to the qadhas and will involve the provincial governor, as well as qaimaqams and the qadha technical branch officials.

The public administration training portion of our campaign is meant to build the bureaucratic foundation of local government that is necessary for effective government. This involves a partnership with USAID and the Iraqi government's training program.

Finally, the brigade is focused on the use of reconstruction funds to both facilitate the reconstruction of physical infrastructure and build government capacity within the qadhas. This is done by enforcing the bureaucratic process within the local governments of nominating, designing, and approving reconstruction projects before the brigade commits reconstruction funds towards these projects.

These government development efforts are challenging and complex and will require tenacity and patience as we move forward in rebuilding Iraq. I see a lot of promise in the future of Iraq. The issues here are difficult and challenging, but not impossible to overcome if the Iraqi people and their elected leaders work together. We're here to help them in this endeavor, whether it is security transition, communications, economics, the essential services or governance, together we can be successful.

With that said, I'd like to turn it back to you for questions.

COL. KECK: Okay, we appreciate that thorough review of your operations. And I would remind you that he cannot see you, so please identify who you are when you ask your question.

Pam.

Q Sir, this is Pam Hess with United Press International. How many police do you have? How many have you added or have you seen added since you all arrived? And what's the relationship between your local population and the extremists? Do they passively tolerate them? Do they actively support them? You said one of your goals is to drive a wedge there, and I'm wondering what your baseline is.

COL. FUNK: Well, that's a great question. And I will tell you that the people of Iraq are tired of the extremists. They are ready to get on with rebuilding Iraq. And we see that more and more every day.

To the second part, the Iraqi police, we have roughly -- in my area I have somewhere in the neighborhood of -- oh, 14 stations. Each one has about 150. So somewhere around a thousand policemen -- a little bit more or less.

Q Colonel, it's John Hendren at ABC News. Can you tell me if you've had any effect from the surge; first of all, whether there are any of those troops in your area. And second of all, whether there's been any spillover in terms of either increased or decreased violence in your area as a result of the increased troop presence in Baghdad?

COL. FUNK: First of all, none of those forces from the surge are in my area, although some are soon to come.

Secondly, we are seeing that the enemy -- based on operations in the city, we're seeing the enemy has to start moving around, and as they move around, we're being much more successful in capturing or killing them.

I will tell you that a good news piece of that is IEDs are down in my sector about 40 percent. And I believe that's a function of the enemy doesn't have time to do as thorough a reconnaissance as they used to when they put them in.

Q If I could follow up on that, could you just give us any numbers on those IED attacks, what they've gone to and from?

COL. FUNK: Well, I've had -- in my area, I have found 330 since I took over the sector in early part of December. Now those numbers are down 40 percent. I used to see somewhere in the neighborhood of 120 a month, and now I'm down less than 65 to 70.

COL. KECK: Mike?

Q Colonel, it's Mike Mount with CNN.

You said, since your arrival, the extrajudicial killings have decreased. Can you quantify that a bit, and also tell us what you've done in order to drop those numbers?

COL. FUNK: Well, first of all, I probably averaged when we first got here as many as eight extrajudicial killings a month, and now I'm down to one or two a month. And I believe that's directly related to getting out with the population, living with them and communicating with them every day. And that's from our joint security stations, where we can project combat power in just about any place that allows us to really focus our efforts to getting to the local populace.

(Off mike) -- partners, I'm partnered with 10 battalions and three brigades, and they're doing the same thing.

COL. KECK: Andrew.

Q Colonel, it's Andrew Gray with Reuters.

You talked a little bit about the struggle that the police service continues to face in Iraq and in your sector. Can you tell us a bit more about those problems? You mentioned in particular accountability, leadership, I think as well.

On a day-to-day basis, what does that mean? Are the police cooperating with you? Are they pursuing a sectarian agenda? What are the problems you face?

COL. FUNK: Well, really the biggest problem is getting them to come back to work, and that's basically because of the logistics functions. We've got to make sure that they get paid on time, they get the proper equipment and training that they need. So it's more of a logistics function of how we're getting those guys to come back. So the accountability piece is literally being present for work. I continue to see improvement in that area, however.

Q What sort of level of manning are police units at in your area. Of those who should be turning up for work, how many are actually present?

COL. FUNK: I would roughly say, 75 percent show up when they're supposed to. Manning levels, as I think I stated a little earlier, are from about 150 per station. That's running three shifts. So it's about 75 percent of that.

Q Colonel, this is Anne Flaherty with the Associated Press.

I was hoping to follow up on an earlier question about the decrease in attacks. You said that one of the things that you were doing that you attributed that was getting out and living with the Iraqis and reaching out to the Iraqi population. It was my understanding that the Army has been doing that all along.

So why -- was your predecessor in your area not doing that previously? Or were there additional troops added into your area? Can you give us more specifics on why you think the attacks decreased?

COL. FUNK: Mostly it's because we're building capacity in the Iraqi army. As I said, now we have the ability to project 10 battalions worth of combat power out in my area. I also do have an additional battalion that my predecessor didn't have, but not based on the surge. That was based on positioning of the stryker element beforehand, and I have their field artillery battalion, the 137. So by -- as we build capacity in the Iraqi army and the police, it allows us the ability to get out more into the communities, where we can in fact talk to the people.

Q Colonel, this is Lisa Burgess with Stars and Stripes.

Are your police primarily Sunni?

And when you talk about the logistics problem and the difficulties with pay, when I was there back in February, there were some issues with the government, which is primarily Shi'ite, being a little reluctant to flow money to the Sunni areas that you control. Are you seeing some of those same issues in general with your -- is that an issue with governance in general, and is that hampering your operations?

COL. FUNK: Well, actually, no, because my area consists of both Sunni and Shi'a on either side of the river, and both are having the pay problems, so I wouldn't make that a sectarian issue; moreover, what I would say is that it is a continuing struggle as we try to build the logistics capacity and functionality. So that's what I would say. I don't see that as a sectarian issue.

COL. KECK: Pam.

Q Pam Hess again. You say you have about a thousand police in your sector for a population of 2 million. Is that enough? How many more do you need? And what kind of cooperation are you getting from -- I suppose there's tribes out there, it being rural -- from them in contributing more people?

COL. FUNK: Actually, that is correct. And we see more and more people wanting to come to the Iraqi police and participate in ridding Iraq of the terror. And so, as a matter of fact, we'll have recruiting drives fairly soon all throughout our sector -- Sunni, Shi'a -- it won't matter. It's the Iraqis wanting to -- wanting one Iraq, and they are ready to stand up and take part in that security.

Q (Off mike) -- for the number of police that you want to get for your sector?

COL. FUNK: Well, I will tell you, I can always use more police. Like I said in the opening statement, I have 160 population centers; in my opinion, we should have police in all of them.

Now, could that be something like the county sheriffs we have back in the States? Perhaps, which would allow you to cover a bigger area. But I'm not sure we're to that level of sophistication yet. But, yes, I would like to have more police, and we are working -- taking the necessary steps to make that happen.

Q Could you just be specific on how many more police you want, and perhaps how many of those 160 population centers don't have sufficient police?

COL. FUNK: Well, I can't really put a number on it. I'd like to be able to, but as 160 population centers, some are small as a hundred people; others, a thousand. So really there's probably a ratio, and I'll have to let the police professionals answer the question of how many more I need, but I would certainly like to have some more, and as I said, we will continue to work towards that. So that's about as specific as I can be on the police issue right now.

Q Colonel, John Hendren again. Can you tell us a little about how far your province is from being turned over to the Iraqis? In other words, it sounds like with those police concerns, that's one of the prime drivers of that decision. How far away do you see this province from being independent?

COL. FUNK: Well, sir, I'm actually part of the Baghdad province, so it's how far Baghdad is. You know, as well build functional physical infrastructure, build functional political infrastructure, build effectiveness and created a fair and open environment -- when Baghdad's ready, we'll be ready.

Q (Off mike) -- question, and -- how about just your area? In other words, is it -- do you foresee in the future being able to redeploy troops from that area to somewhere else?

COL. FUNK: Actually, I'm not sure, because I believe, with the number of forces that we have in Taji now, this may be one of the places that we'll have forces.

Y'all saw on the -- I don't know if you know anything about Taji itself, but that's also where the Iraqi training compound is. So all the Iraqi schools -- engineering school, the armor school, those types of military schools -- are on this compound as well. So I think as long as we're helping the Iraqi army build capacity, we'll have U.S. forces here.

Ground combat forces? I don't know the answer to that.

Q Colonel Funk, I'm Gerry Gilmore with American Forces Press Service. You indicated that there's progress being made in tamping down the violence in your area of operations. How much of the Iraqi troops help, with your troops as partners? You said that the enemy doesn't have as much time as before to place IEDs, perhaps. How are the Iraqis helping in this regard?

COL. FUNK: Well, I'll tell you, they're doing a fantastic job in my area. The two -- two of the brigades are absolutely outstanding. And I will tell you that we partner almost every mission almost every day. And that's where the improvements lie, and that's where the capacity is built to really become more effective, a more effective force, by doing it day in and day out together. That's how I see the Iraqi security forces improving. And they are a huge part in my fight up here.

Q (Off mike) -- a wedge between the insurgents and the population, how are the Iraqi security forces helping you gather more intel to thwart some of these attacks? Are they doing that? (Off mike) -- population getting tips --

COL. FUNK: Absolutely they are. They're absolutely doing that. You know, it's their country. They recognize people that -- and in many cases, it's their neighborhoods, and they recognize foreigners, and they understand different dialects of Arabic. So they are a tremendous resource in terms of intelligence and reconnaissance.

COL. KECK: (Off mike) -- take one more.

Go ahead, Lisa.

Q This is Lisa Burgess again with Stars and Stripes. Can you talk a little bit more about some of the

issues related to the Sunni insurgent rat lines that you have up there and some of the operations that your soldiers are doing to try and quell that?

COL. FUNK: Well, first of all, I think there are absolutely -- that's the absolute right name for them -- rat lines.

Secondly, we are working -- as I build capacity in the Iraqi army and as we continue to understand our environment and our sector better, we're cutting those off. By changing the number of advisers, you know, or partnering with the Iraqi army units, we're really increasing the eyes, you know, and a ratio which was 1 to 70 is now 1 to 14. So it is really -- it's really something to see. I'm very proud of how well both my unit and both -- and all the Iraqi army units are doing in my zone to stamp out the insurgents and to cut down things like the rat lines.

Q (Off mike) -- perhaps one of the more recent operations that you did, maybe in the last week or so, just a little something, talk proud about your troops?

COL. FUNK: Yeah, I would love to. And it happened -- it happens to be that it's a partnered operation. We conducted an Iraqi-led brigade operation on both sides of the Tigris River, in two of the most difficult areas in my sector, commanded and controlled by the Iraqis, where my -- the partner unit with them, 1-7 Cavalry, provided a QRF access to the aviation. They actually detained over 18 insurgents, found three or four caches.

And it was a tremendously well-executed brigade-level operation done by the Iraqis with the assistance of my great troopers.

COL. KECK: (Off mike) -- timeframe of that operation?

COL. FUNK: Can you hear me?

COL. KECK: Well, yeah. Paul, can -- (off mike)?

COL. FUNK: I'll have to get your name. I cannot remember right off the top of my head what the name of that operation was.

Q (Off mike) -- last week --

Q Yeah, just looking for the timeframe.

COL. FUNK: I'm sorry, I didn't hear you.

Q We're looking for the time frame of that operation. Was that very recently, within the last month?

COL. FUNK: It was actually within the last two weeks.

COL. KECK: All right, appreciate it.

Well, thank you much, Colonel Funk, for being with us today -- (off mike) -- on what's going on in your sector. Do you have any closing comments you'd like to make?

COL. FUNK: I do. First of all, I'd like to take the opportunity to again thank our family readiness groups and the rear detachment commands for their enduring support. They are the substance behind our success.

Also, I want to say how proud I am to be able to tell the story of the Ironhorse Brigade Combat Team and our fabulous troops. They astound me every day with their agility, lethality and compassion. And we will continue

the work to drive a wedge between the insurgents and the population in partnership with the Iraqi army and police. And as that wedge drives deeper, and as the capacity of the local government grows, we in the Ironhorse Brigade believe that the populace will realize that a successful future is on the horizon for the people of Iraq.

Thank you for your questions and for your time. First Team and Ironhorse. And a little caveat, that operation that I named was called Decapitated Serpent.

COL. KECK: Okay, Colonel Funk. We appreciate it. We hope to hear from you again real soon. Thank you.

COL. FUNK: You bet. Have a great day. Ironhorse!

Copyright (c) 2007 by Federal News Service, Inc., Ste. 500 1000 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20005, USA. Federal News Service is a private firm not affiliated with the federal government. No portion of this transcript may be copied, sold or retransmitted without the written authority of Federal News Service, Inc. Copyright is not claimed as to any part of the original work prepared by a United States government officer or employee as a part of that person's official duties. For information on subscribing to the FNS Internet Service, please visit <http://www.fednews.com> or call(202)347-1400