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**Presenter: Commander, 4th Brigade 1st Cavalry Division Col. Stephen M. Twitty July 27, 2007 9:00 AM EDT**

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**DoD News Briefing with Col. Twitty from Iraq**

(Note: Colonel Twitty appears via video teleconference from Iraq.)

JAMES TURNER (deputy director, Defense Press Office): Colonel Twitty, this is Jim Turner in the Pentagon Briefing Room. Can you hear me?

COL. TWITTY: Yes. This is Colonel Steph Twitty. I can hear you just fine.

MR. TURNER: Great. All right, let's get started.

Good morning. We're privileged to have as today's briefer Colonel Stephen Twitty, commander of the 4th Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division. Colonel Twitty's brigade began operations in Multinational -- excuse me -- Multinational Division North in December of 2006. Their general area of responsibility is centered around Nineveh province. He's coming to us today from Forward Operating Base Marez, just outside Mosul. This is the second opportunity to brief the Pentagon Press Corps, having spoken to us last March.

Colonel, thank you for taking the time to join us today, and I'll turn it over to you for your opening comments and then questions from there.

COL. TWITTY: Good morning. I'm Colonel Stephen Twitty, the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division commander. It is good to speak with you again, and I thank you for this opportunity to update you on the accomplishments and challenges that we face here in Nineveh province.

This morning I will discuss how the Iraqi security forces and provincial government are increasing their capability and facing their challenges, and how we are assisting them in those areas. I will also give you my assessment of the anti-Iraqi forces that operate in Nineveh province.

The Brigade Combat Team assumed control of Nineveh province in December 2006. During that time, we averaged 15 to 18 attacks a day. That same month, the 3rd Iraqi Army Division executed a transfer of authority, followed by the 2nd Iraqi Army Division in January 2007, putting both divisions under Iraqi ground forces control.

In February my brigade combat team transitioned from two coalition force battalions providing security in Mosul to one. This is a testament to the capability of the Iraqi security forces here in the province.

During the last press conference, in March, I told you that we averaged 10 to 13 attacks a day in the province. Today we average seven to nine attacks a day. This is due to the diligence of both the 2nd and the 3rd Iraqi Army Divisions and the Iraqi police that operate in the province.

The province is the size of Maryland, and Mosul is the second-largest city in Iraq, with about 2.6 million citizens.

There are approximately 19,000 Iraqi police and 20,000 Iraqi army soldiers that make up the security forces in Nineveh province. So in total, the province has an upwards of 40,000 Iraqi security forces dedicated to security, and they are doing a great job of fighting the enemy.

An example of this occurred on 16 May, when insurgents attacked throughout Mosul with nine vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices and dismounted forces. The Iraqi security forces stood their ground and destroyed the majority of the VBIEDs, but they could reach -- so they could not reach their final destination, decisively defeating the attack.

The Iraqi security forces have the will, the personnel and most of the equipment to fight, but they face challenges with their logistics management, engineer capability, medical support and the lack of aviation assets. These are the areas that the Iraqi security forces must develop and that the Iraqi government must provide for their forces.

Both the Iraqi army and police will continue to grow in their capability and personnel. In the near future, we expect to recruit 3,000 new Iraqi policemen and to stand up three new Iraqi army battalions to augment the current standing Iraqi security forces. These additional forces will solidify the current effort in the province.

Our collaborative efforts to remove the insurgency in Nineveh have been very successful. The insurgents have been plagued with infighting amongst several groups of the Islamic State of Iraq, and it continues to attempt to influence operations here in Nineveh. This infighting caused decreased effectiveness of insurgent attacks in June.

This month insurgent forces received little to no financial and logistics support due to the strong Iraqi police, Iraqi army and coalition force presence and operations. These operations have resulted in the seizure of 11 caches and the capture of several insurgent leaders.

Greater security has allowed us to focus more on the restoration of the essential service for the populace and the strengthening of the local government. I expect Nineveh government to go under provincial Iraqi control in August. This will be a major step for the security forces and the provincial government to be totally under control of the Iraqi government.

Security is stabilizing in the province, and the populace is paying (sic) an active role in assisting Iraqi security forces in detaining Iraqi -- anti-Iraqi forces and calling in to various locations throughout the province to provide tips so that coalition forces and Iraqi security forces can conduct raids throughout the province.

The essential services are on the rise. Fuel flow in the province is consistent, and it's getting better every day. All of these events and actions are indicative of a functioning and competent provincial government.

We're developing a functioning court system here in the province, and judges visit Mosul from Baghdad on a regular basis to hold court for the criminals and insurgents that are detained. Other areas of the government such as infrastructure, planning and budgeting also are in place and are operating.

Finally, I will tell you that Nineveh province is on its way to Iraqi control, and the insurgents are trying to

find a way to derail that. I believe that the Iraqi security forces and government leadership are up to the challenge and will prevail. I would like to thank our families and supporters in El Paso and Fort Bliss and the American people for their support. You can be proud of the soldiers in the brigade combat team. They're making a difference for the Iraqi people of Nineveh province.

I will now take your questions.

MR. TURNER: Okay, thank you, colonel. Let's get into those questions.

Jeff.

Q Colonel, Jeff Schogol with Stars and Stripes. When you're talking about the decreasing number of attacks, are these attacks specifically against U.S. and Iraqi forces or are they also attacks against Iraqi civilians?

COL. TWITTY: We track attacks along three areas here: the Iraqi security forces, coalition forces, and also local nationals. So to answer your question, it is amongst those three groups that we track the attacks.

Q Colonel, this is Guy Raz from NPR radio. Can you tell us, the insurgents that you are capturing, are you finding most of them are Iraqi or most of them are foreign fighters? And in terms of the foreign fighters, where are most of them coming from, what are you seeing out there?

COL. TWITTY: We've found most of the insurgents are Iraqi, Sunni-Arab Iraqis, although we have found some foreign fighters, and I will tell you that they're coming from various locations. We have detained foreign fighters from Saudi Arabia, from Syria, from Qatar, you name it, but the bottom line, we do have foreign fighters here in the province. We're not seeing a huge amount of foreign fighters. The majority of insurgents that we are either detaining or killing are pretty much Iraqi -- anti-Iraqi forces, which make up the Sunni insurgency.

Q Colonel, Julian Barnes from the Los Angeles Times. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about sectarian relations in Mosul and in your province. What are the Kurdish-Arab -- either violence between the two the groups in Mosul and in the surrounding province?

COL. TWITTY: Yes, we have an interesting mix of groups here in Mosul and Nineveh province. This province, the make-up, the ethnic make-up is 45 percent Sunni, 40 percent Kurdish, and then you have 10 percent other with about 5 or so percent of that being Shi'a, Yezidi, Christians and so forth. We are seeing some ethnic tensions between the Sunnis here and the Kurds. It is not a overwhelming part of what we do on a daily basis.

A lot of the attacks that we see that occur against the Yezidis and the Kurds are pretty much isolated events.

I'll give you an example. I'm sure you heard about the attack on the Yezidis where there was a Yezidi lady that was stoned. That was an isolated event that dealt with the Yezidi marrying a Sunni Arab.

And then we get various attacks on Sunnis, particularly in the month of -- correction, on Kurds, particularly in the month of May. We had nine VBIED attacks against Kurdish-dominated areas, and I think that that related to Article 140. But we're just not seeing the everyday attacks against Kurds and pretty much we're getting along in that regards. We're not seeing a lot of sectarian violence up here at all.

Q And colonel, if I could just quickly follow up, your security forces, are they generally mixed Kurdish Arab? And do you generally have Kurdish units in the Kurdish neighborhoods? Or how is that working currently?

COL. TWITTY: That's an excellent question.

In both divisions, you have a mixture of Kurds, Sunni and in particular in the 3rd Iraqi Army Division, you have a mixture of Shi'a. Because the 3rd Iraqi Army Division operates out in the Tall Afar area, and that's 50 percent Shi'a, 50 percent Sunni Turkoman out there. They are operating just fine together, and we do not try and put units that are predominantly Kurdish in Kurdish-dominated areas or predominantly Sunni in Sunni-dominated areas.

The Iraqi security forces fully understand that they're working for one Iraq and that regardless of what ethnicity, your duty is to protect the locals and this nation from the insurgency. So I'm not seeing any type of agenda to try and put Kurds that belong to the Iraqi security forces in Kurdish-dominated areas or Sunnis in Sunni-dominated areas. When it comes to the police here in Nineveh province, the police are normally -- excuse me predominantly Sunni. And they operate pretty much all over the province regardless of what neighborhood in terms of ethnicity and they're doing a fine job as well.

Q Colonel, it's Al Pessin from Voice of America. I wanted to follow up on two things that you said if I could.

One, about the foreign fighters' role, you said there were relatively few foreign fighters. But I was wondering if they operate on their own or in small groups of foreign fighters. Or do they take sort of a leadership role in the broader insurgency and act as sort of accelerants on their own?

And at the beginning of your opening statement, you mentioned something about a reduction in U.S. battalions. Could you expand on that, tell us how many troops you're going down? Where are those troops going and could this be the beginning of what everybody in Washington is waiting for?

COL. TWITTY: I'll talk -- tackle the troops here. The intent when we first got on the ground here is to focus on the Iraqi security forces, specifically the army. So what happened when we first got on the ground here is we took a battalion out of Mosul and we moved it to what we call the super MiTT, which is the military training team. And the intent of that was to place that force under a training team that would train the Iraqi security force and focus on areas such as engineer capabilities, intelligence capabilities, assist them with their logistics, to get them up to a level to where they can go out and operate independently.

So that's why we reduced the combat power here in Mosul, so we could really focus on the Iraqi army becoming proficient in those skills that we thought that they were weak in. And that has paid huge dividends for the Iraqi army here in the province, for both 2nd Iraqi Army Division and 3rd Iraqi Army Division.

We are not seeing where we need to reduce forces here in the province as of yet. Security is getting better, but I do not want to call success here yet. We are looking at options based on the security getting here -- based on security becoming better here. And my leadership, they're doing prudent planning because at some point in time my brigade combat team will move out and be replaced and another one will come in. So we have to make the best use of the Brigade Combat Team that's coming in here based on the enemy situation.

Q On the question about the foreign fighters?

COL. TWITTY: In terms of the foreign fighters, as I stated, we're just not seeing a huge amount of foreign fighters in the province. But what we are seeing is those foreign fighters are mostly al Qaeda-based foreign fighters, and they are the ones that's taking on the leadership role here in the province. They're the ones that are directing the VBIEDs and often participate in the VBIEDs. So they become suicide bombers. They're the ones that participate in the suicide vest operations and so forth. And from what I can tell, they are the ringleaders and they are the ones that are pretty much mustering the al Qaeda throughout the province in order to conduct these horrific attacks against local nationals as well as the Iraqi security forces.

MR. TURNER: Jim?

Q Colonel, this Jim Garamone with American Forces Press Service. When Nineveh transfers over to provincial Iraqi control, that will be the largest province to transfer over. How does that change the dynamic for you?

COL. TWITTY: Well, this provincial government has taken on much of the leadership here in the province. We have a very mature provincial government here. We have Governor Kashmula, who is really out front in a lot of the issues that need to be tackled here in the province. So he will continue to grow in those roles.

The way it is currently, we have the PRT, the provincial reconstruction team that's up here, that coaches and mentors the provincial government up here, as well as my staff and I spend a lot of time with the governor. And I will tell you, since I've been here, in nine months I have seen this government mature, so they will be able to operate pretty much independently and run the provincial government pretty much independently.

In terms of provincial Iraqi control for the Iraqi security forces, we already have both divisions under Iraqi ground forces control, so they are well on their way. So we still continue to see a need for the PRT to be here and will probably see a need for some type of coalition forces up here. That may or may not be a robust force like I have, and it's going to be based on the security situation here.

I will tell you today, as I look at the security situation -- and it's been this way for about two to two and a half months now -- that it is showing great promise, with the possibility of reducing forces here. But we must not call victory yet, and we must continue to look at the situation up here.

And as we nominate this province for PIC, part of the things that I will be advising my higher, and my highers will be looking at -- and that will be the possibility of possibly reducing forces up here. So in terms of going to PIC, I'd think just define what we're looking at, and I think over the next couple of months we'll be able to make some good recommendations to our highers.

MR. TURNER: Andrew.

Q Colonel, this is Andrew Gray from Reuters. I think there were some fears that with the major operations that took place in Diyala province, that some of the al Qaeda leaders there may move, perhaps to Nineveh and to Mosul. Have you seen any sign of that? Even though the overall number of attacks is decreasing, are you seeing any increase in al Qaeda in Iraq activity in your area?

COL. TWITTY: We're not seeing the migration of al Qaeda moving up to Nineveh province.

As operations kicked off in Baqubah and Diyala province, we kicked off our operations as well, as part of a supporting effort to those particular operations.

We conducted operations throughout this province, not only coalition forces but the Iraqi police and the Iraqi army, to ensure that we maintain the pressure on al Qaeda and other insurgent forces up here, as those operations were going on.

MR. TURNER: Jeff.

Q Colonel, Jeff with Stars and Stripes again. I just wanted to make sure I understood one of your comments correctly. Are you saying that an entire battalion essentially became one MiTT team? And could you elaborate on -- I mean, is that the largest MiTT team in Iraq?

COL. TWITTY: What I am saying is, we took that battalion that we pulled out of Mosul, and we took the platoons out of that battalion, and we assigned a platoon to each Iraqi army brigade. And as you know, an Iraqi army brigade already has a MiTT team assigned to it. So our training capability increased by adding that platoon to the MiTT team that's already assigned to that brigade.

And we were able to quickly train some areas that we felt necessary that the Iraqi army needed. For instance, when we got on the ground here, the Iraqi army did not have engineer route capability to deal with the all IEDs that we have throughout the province. They are now conducting their own engineer route clearance capability throughout the province. And we're proud of that because they pretty much stood that organization up, we assisted them in training, and now they're leading that effort throughout the province.

Another area: we focused hard on their medical platoon and their medical companies. And we have them now taking care of their own soldiers, whereas when we first came in here, we were pretty much assisting in treating their soldiers. They're doing all that themselves now.

We've increased their intelligence capability to where they're able to conduct intelligence-driven raids based off the HUMINT that they're getting, the human intelligence that they're getting from the local populace now. So they're doing a lot of raids now intelligence- driven. When we first got on the ground here, they were doing mostly cordon-and-searches of big neighborhoods, where they really couldn't focus on where the enemy was located in those neighborhoods, and now they're doing so.

Q (inaudible) now conducting route clearance, have U.S. troops given the Iraqis their own MRAPs?

COL. TWITTY: No. What they are doing conducting operations with now, they're in 113s. They do have robotic capability to assist them. They have the Marez and they have a myriad of stuff that their government has given them. And once again, they're leading that operation today. We're assisting them. We'll never let them fail. We will continue to assist them until they fully have it, but they're in the lead.

Q Colonel, just to follow up a little bit more on the MiTT team. Are these soldiers -- the battalion that became the supplemental MiTT team, are they in Mosul, or are they in bases outside of Mosul, or do they just move as Iraqi army and police move?

COL. TWITTY: They're in combat outposts throughout Nineveh province. They sleep alongside their Iraqi counterparts, their Iraqi brigades that are out there in these various COPs, and they are there -- whenever the Iraqi army conducts operations, they conduct operations alongside them. They are constantly doing after action reviews with the Iraqi army to ensure that there are lessons learned from each operation that's conducted, and they continue to train the Iraqi army while in their bases at those COPs. We have a very aggressive training plan that we have outlined that we've gotten agreement with with both the Iraqi division commanders. Here are the courses that we think are necessary in order to train you to the level that you need to be trained in order to grow and be better and fight this insurgency, and they have taken that on, and they're training in those areas.

MR. TURNER: Okay, one last question.

AI.

Q Colonel, it's Al Pessin again from Voice of America. Just to clarify what you were saying about the numbers in your area, you were saying, I think, that maybe at about the time that you leave, that the group that replaces you might not need to be as robust. Can you tell us when that will be? Do you think the drawdown or the change of configuration could happen before you leave?

And also, I wanted to ask you about the supply. You talk about how much the Iraqi army has improved in

the time that you've been there, but we heard a complaint this week from the Iraqi ambassador here in Washington that on the whole they're not getting the equipment, the personal equipment and the vehicles that they need. So can you tell us, what's the situation in your AOR?

COL. TWITTY: AI, I'll tell you that the weakest area and where I get frustrated routinely is their supply system. We continue to (inaudible) the system with various supplies, and that's not only the Iraqi army but the Iraqi police. We're working that hard. My boss, Major General Mixon, is working that hard in order to push the Iraqi government to assist the Iraqi army and the Iraqi police with providing essential supplies in order to fight this insurgency; to provide the fuel, to provide the weapons, the ammunition, the helmets that they need, the body armor that they need, the vehicles that they need.

So that is the one area that I see as a huge weakness throughout the Iraqi army and the Iraqi police, and we just to keep working it. And the Iraqi government has to understand, in order to sustain this fight to protect the Iraqi security forces they have to supply these items for them. So that's a weakness.

The other area that you talked about is with the numbers of attacks that we're seeing throughout the province, if we can continue on this trend, these numbers, the seven to nine attacks that I spoke of early, we should be rotating out of here about December time frame. And based on the number of attacks, if these trends continue to hold, if we continue in the right direction with the provincial government, then I can foresee the possibility of my replacement coming in here may not be as robust as my particular brigade combat team rotates out.

So I'm not ready to make any type of recommendations to my higher headquarters. We're assessing every day. My higher headquarters is doing the same thing, and we'll see as we get closer to the time for us to rotate out.

But it looks promising in Nineveh province. And as we continue to fight this insurgency, provide for the people, then I'm sure that there will be recommendations, not only by me but by my boss as well.

MR. TURNER: Okay, colonel, thanks for your insights. Would you care to share any final thoughts with us?

COL. TWITTY: Yeah, I would just like to say that I see Nineveh province as a success story. In the nine months that we've been here, we've made significant progress here. And when I say we, I'm talking about the Iraqi people here, the Iraqi security forces, being the Iraqi army and the Iraqi police and the provincial government. And I see positive things here and I think that it shows great promise. And let's just hope that we can continue to provide success here and provide for the people here.

Thank you.

MR. TURNER: Thank you, colonel. We appreciate your time and hope to see you again in our briefing room sometime in the future.

COL. TWITTY: Thank you.