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April 26, 2007 10:00 AM EDT

DoD News Briefing with Gen. Petraeus from the Pentagon

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well good morning. It's good to be with you all, and nice to see some familiar faces here this morning. My purpose this morning is to provide a short update on the situation in Iraq, including a brief description of the operational environment, the challenges Iraq faces, and the status of our operations, and then to take your questions. This is similar to my briefings to the House and Senate yesterday afternoon, but without the classified information that I provided to them, obviously.

The operational environment in Iraq is the most complex and challenging I have ever seen -- much more complex than it was when I left last in September 2005, and vastly more complex than what I recall in Central America, Haiti and the Balkans in previous tours in those locations.

The increase in sectarian violence in 2006 following the Samarra Mosque bombing did enormous damage, literally tearing the fabric of Iraqi society, changing the demographics of Baghdad neighborhoods, and displacing millions of Iraqis.

Today, members of al Qaeda, extremist militias and Sunni insurgent groups seek to destroy what Iraqi leaders are trying to build. Political parties with ethnosectarian interests, limited governmental capacity, and corruption add additional challenges, and exceedingly unhelpful activities by Iran and Syria, especially those by Iran, about which we have learned a great deal in the past month, compound the enormous problems facing the new Iraq.

The situation is, in short, exceedingly challenging, though as I will briefly explain, there has been progress in several areas in recent months despite the sensational attacks by al Qaeda, which have, of course, been significant blows to our effort and which cause psychological damage that is typically even greater than their physical damage.

Iraq is, in fact, the central front of al Qaeda's global campaign and we devote considerable resources to the fight against al Qaeda Iraq.

We have achieved some notable successes in the past two months, killing the security emir of eastern Anbar province, detaining a number of key network leaders, discovering how various elements of al Qaeda Iraq operate, taking apart a car bomb network that had killed 650 citizens of Baghdad, and destroying several significant car bomb factories. Nonetheless, al Qaeda Iraq remains a formidable foe with considerable resilience

and a capability to produce horrific attacks, but a group whose ideology and methods have increasingly alienated many in Iraq.

This group's activities must be significantly disrupted, at the least, for the new Iraq to succeed, and it has been heartening to see Sunni Arabs in Anbar province and several other areas turning against al Qaeda and joining the Iraqi security forces to fight against it. That has been a very significant development.

The extremist militias in Iraq also are a substantial problem and must be significantly disrupted. There can be no sustainable outcome if militia death squads are allowed to lie low during the surge only to resurface later and resume killing and intimidation.

There have been some significant successes in this arena as well, including the detentions -- detention of the heads of the Sadr secret cell network, the Iraqi leader of an explosively formed projectile network from Iran, the former deputy minister of Health and his facility protection security force brigadier, who had effectively hijacked the Ministry of Health, and a national police officer accused of torture, with several of these detained by Iraqi forces.

Sunni insurgents and the so-called Sunni resistance are still forces that must be reckoned with, as well. However, while we continue to battle a number of such groups, we are seeing some others joining Sunni Arab tribes in turning against al Qaeda Iraq and helping transform Anbar province and other areas from being assessed as lost as little as six months ago to being relatively heartening. We will continue to engage with Sunni tribal sheikhs and former insurgent leaders to support the newfound opposition of some to al Qaeda, ensuring that their fighters join legitimate Iraqi security force elements to become part of the fight against extremists, just as we reach out to moderate members of all sects and ethnic groups to try to drive a wedge between the irreconcilables and the reconcilables, and help the latter become part of the solution instead of part of the problem.

There are also a number of challenges in the area of governance that the embassy and Multinational Force Iraq are helping the Iraqis to address. It is in fact important to recall that the government of Prime Minister Maliki is Iraq's fourth government in as many years. Moreover, it is not a government of national unity. Rather, it is one comprised of political leaders from different parties that often default to narrow agendas and a zero-sum approach to legislation.

That is one reason that progress on key laws has been slow, though there has been some progress. The budget law, the base hydrocarbon law approved by the Council of Ministers, the emergency powers law and so forth have all been noteworthy. And it is in fact just noteworthy to acknowledge, as Ambassador Negroponte did yesterday, just what Iraq has achieved since he served there as the ambassador in 2004, with respect to its elections, its constitution, its government and so forth. I believe Prime Minister Maliki and many other Iraqi leaders are committed to achieving more in this area in the months ahead.

Though its institutions are slowly developing, Iraq still suffers from a lack of the governmental capacity needed to put Iraq's oil revenues to work sufficiently for all its people. In view of this, we are working hard, together with the U.S. embassy again, to help strengthen institutions, doubling the number of Provincial Reconstruction Teams, establishing a law and order task force, developing an energy fusion cell, and increasing emphasis on ministerial mentorship.

The focus of Multinational Force Iraq is, of course, on working with our Iraqi counterparts to help improve security for the people of Iraq in order to give Iraqi leaders the time and space they need to come to grips with the tough political issues that must be resolved. Resolution of these issues is the key to the achievement of reconciliation among the various ethnic and sectarian groups, political parties and leaders in order to achieve a lasting solution to Iraq's problems.

We are still in the relatively early stages of our new effort, about two months into it, with three of five Army surge brigades and two additional Marine battalions on the ground, and the remainder of the additional combat forces scheduled to be operating in their areas by mid-June.

Baghdad is the main effort, and we continue to establish joint security stations and combat outposts in the city and in the belts around it. The presence of coalition and Iraqi forces and increased operational tempo, especially in areas where until recently we had no sustained presence, have begun to produce results. Most significantly, Iraqi and coalition forces have helped to bring about a substantial reduction in the rate of sectarian murders each month from January until now in Baghdad, a reduction of about two-thirds. There have also been increases in weapons caches seized and the number of actionable tips received.

In the Ramadi area, for example, U.S. and Iraqi forces have found nearly as many caches in the first four months of this year as they found in all of last year.

Beyond this, we are seeing a revival of markets, renewed commerce, the return of some displaced families and the slow resumption of services, though I want to be very clear that there is vastly more work to be done across the board and in many areas, and I again note that we are really just getting started with the new effort.

I am well aware that the sense of gradual progress and achievement we feel on the ground in many areas in Iraq is often eclipsed by the sensational attacks that overshadow our daily accomplishments. While the enemy's effectiveness in carrying out such attacks has been reduced by our operations to some degree, there clearly are still far too many of them, and we obviously are focusing heavily on actions to identify and dismantle the networks that carry out car bomb and suicide vest attacks and their supporting infrastructure.

Our achievements have not come without sacrifice. Our increase in operational tempo, location of our forces in the populations they are securing and conduct of operations in areas where we previously had no presence, as well as the enemy's greater use of certain types of explosive devices, have led to an increase in our losses. Our Iraqi partners have sacrificed heavily as well, with losses generally two to three times ours or even more.

Indeed, while some Iraqi forces remain a work in progress, there should be no question that Iraq's soldiers and police are fighting and dying for their country, and a number of them have impressively shouldered their part of the burden of the fight against al Qaeda and the other enemies of the new Iraq. To help them progress, we have steadily been increasing the number of transition teams, the train and equip effort, and steadily strengthening the partnership programs between our forces and Iraqi elements.

The situation in Iraq is, in sum, exceedingly complex and very tough. Success will take continued commitment, perseverance and sacrifice, all to make possible an opportunity for the all-important Iraqi political actions that are the key to long-term solutions to Iraq's many problems. Because we are operating in new areas and challenging elements in those areas, this effort may get harder before it gets easier.

Success, in the end, will depend on Iraqi actions. As I noted during my confirmation hearing, military action is necessary but not sufficient. We can provide the Iraqis an opportunity, but they will have to exploit it.

During Secretary Gates' recent visit to Iraq, we agreed that in early September, Ambassador Ryan Crocker and I would provide an assessment of the situation in Iraq with respect to our mission and offer recommendations on the way ahead. We will be forthright in that assessment, as I believe I have been with you today.

Finally, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all Americans for their support of our soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, and civilians serving in Iraq. Our young men and women in uniform deserve

the recognition that Tom Brokaw accorded them when he described them as America's "new greatest generation." It's a privilege to serve with them again.

Thank you. And I look forward to your questions.

Q You say that Iraq is now the central focus of al Qaeda's worldwide effort. Are you saying that al Qaeda in Iraq is now the sort of principal enemy of the U.S. forces stationed there? Before it was Shi'a groups. And do you see that al Qaeda in Iraq -- do you see any evidence that it is linked internationally to bin Laden? How many foreign fighters are actually there?

GEN. PETRAEUS: First of all, we do definitely see links to the greater al Qaeda network. I think you know that we have at various times intercepted messages to and from. There is no question but that there is a network that supports the movement of foreign fighters through Syria into Iraq.

It is something we can, you know, keep some track of in a broad way. Obviously, when we can get the final 50 meters, if you will, we then take action against it.

It is clearly the element in Iraq that conducts the sensational attacks, these attacks that, as I mentioned, cause not just horrific physical damage -- and which, by the way, have been increasingly indiscriminate. Secretary Gates noted the other day that al Qaeda has declared war on all Iraqis, and I think that that is an accurate statement. They have killed and wounded and maimed countless Iraqi civilians in addition to, certainly, coalition and Iraqi security forces, and they have done that, again, without regard to ethnosectarian identity.

That significance of al Qaeda in the conduct of the sensational attacks, the huge car bomb attacks against which we have been hardening markets, hardening neighborhoods, trying to limit movement and so forth -- those attacks, again, are of extraordinary significance because they can literally drown out anything else that might be happening.

As I mentioned, we generally in many areas -- not all, but in many areas -- have a sense of sort of incremental progress. Again, that is not transmitted at all. Of course it will never break through the noise and the understandable coverage given to it in the press of a sensational attack that kills many Iraqis.

So this is a -- you know, it is a very significant enemy. I think it is probably public enemy number one. It is the enemy whose actions sparked the enormous increase in sectarian violence that did so much damage to Iraq in 2006, the bombing of the Al Askari mosque in Samarra, the gold-domed mosque there, the third holiest Shi'a shrine. And it is the organization that continues to try to reignite not just sectarian violence but ethnic violence, as well, going after Iraqi Kurds in Nineveh province and Kirkuk and areas such as that, as well. So again, I think a very, very significant enemy in that regard.

Q Number of foreign fighters?

GEN. PETRAEUS: I wouldn't hazard I guess. What I will say is that there are certainly dozens of foreign fighters who do come into the country on a monthly basis; again, sometimes more, sometimes less, depending on the state of the network.

It is obviously a network that we do focus on and try to disrupt very considerably.

Michael.

Q (Off mike.) What would be the -- in your assessment as a military man, what would be the consequences on the ground in Baghdad if the United States was to pull back from its security mission in the

capital by the fall, withdraw its forces, say, to the forward- operating bases in the capital and maybe withdraw from Iraq by the summer of '08? I'm not asking you about congressional legislation, about timelines. I'm asking you for your military assessment of the effects on the ground if the U.S. were to end its security mission in Baghdad in the fall, in terms of insurgent activity, the vulnerability of the population and sectarian violence.

GEN. PETRAEUS: I have, as you know, in fact tried to stay clear of the political minefields of various legislative proposals and so forth. And I think, you know, the commander on the ground's job is to understand the mission he's given, make the request for the forces that are needed to accomplish that mission and then identify the risks, if you will, when all those forces may not be provided those resources. We are doing what we're doing, increasing our forces, in response to an increase in sectarian violence that took place in the year 2006. And it continued into January, when in fact sectarian murders were still very, very high in Baghdad. And that doesn't imply that they are at an acceptable level now, but they are about one-third what they were, say, as recently as January.

We believe that the presence of our forces and Iraqi forces in neighborhoods, the focus on the so-called extrajudicial killing, EJK, cells is at least in substantial part a reason for the reduction in these sectarian killings. So I think it's -- depending on where we are in September, of course, and I think that's a key question: How much progress can we make? My sense is that there would be an increase in sectarian violence, a resumption of sectarian violence, were the presence of our forces and Iraqi forces at that time to be reduced and not to be doing what it is that they are doing right now.

And I think again that carries through. In each case you have to make some assumptions about where you think you might be at that time. You could have some optimistic assumptions; you could have some pessimistic assumptions. And then that would determine, I think, what the result would be in terms of the resumption of insurgent activity, extremist activity in terms of the various death squads.

By the way, I'm not talking about the run-of-the-mill Jaish al- Mahdi, by the way. I'd like to distinguish between just sort of the young men with guns on the streets at various points in time and these extremist cells, which are the ones that cannot exist as they did in the past if Iraq is to have a sustainable situation at some point in time down the road.

Right here.

Q General, Lolita Baldor with AP. You said just now that things are likely to get -- may get worse before they get better. What kind of progress are you seeing or do you expect to see over the next couple of months that you think you'll be able to make this assessment in September? And if the Iraqi government does leave for a recess, which the secretary has asked them not to, will that postpone or impair your ability to make this assessment in September or just stall any improvements there?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, we're going to make the assessment in early September. That's a commitment that Ambassador Crocker and I have made. By the way, we are determined to continue to operate as Ambassador Khalilzad and General Casey did -- one team, one mission -- and to carry on the embassy and Multinational Force Iraq literally linked arms as we do that.

But we have committed to make that assessment in September. We think that's the appropriate time to make it. It will be a time at which we will have had our additional forces on the ground for several months, all of them operating in the areas in which we intend to deploy them. We will have seen additional Iraqi security forces -- I forget the exact number that is being trained just in the month of May that will graduate from this greatly expanded institutional training capacity of the Iraqis. I think it's in the order of 7,000 to 9,000 in the military alone. But we can get that to you later. So they will have been, you know, beefed up continually during this time. There's additional equipment continually flowing to them. I note, by the way, they have well over 2,500 up-armored humvees alone now, a mech division, a wheeled armored vehicle brigade, and so forth.

So again, all of this will have gone on. And then on the Iraqi governmental side, they will have had a number of additional days -- meetings of the Council of Representatives. Our additional Provincial Reconstruction Teams will have been at work, the budget execution focus, the Rule of Law Task Force, and so forth.

We'll have seen whether in fact our efforts in these areas have helped produce the kind of progress that they're designed in fact to produce and to see if there is an exploitation of the opportunity that we believe our soldiers and Iraqi soldiers and police will have provided to the Iraqi governmental leaders to come to grips, again, with some of these really tough legislative issues.

Secretary Gates made pretty clear, I think, about the expectations that -- you know, that -- given the hard work of our soldiers and the Iraqi soldiers, that one would certainly hope that the Iraqi legislators would match that with their own hard work. That's our expectation. They want their country to succeed, needless to say, and it's going to require them obviously coming together to make the kind of progress that we think is important.

Yes, Tom.

Q You talk about continued commitment and perseverance and sacrifice, and you also say, as we've heard for years now, success will depend on the Iraqis. And I'm just wondering, do you anticipate high levels of troops -- American troops in Iraq -- let's say, 100,000 or thereabouts -- for years to come?

GEN. PETRAEUS: I'm not -- I wouldn't try to truly -- to anticipate what levels would be some years down the road. I think that my predecessor at various times -- a number of people have noted the length of commitment that has been required, and historical cases are somewhat similar to this, although every case is absolutely unique, and the challenges here, as I mentioned, are enormous, with huge regional implications as well.

It is an endeavor, again, that clearly is going to require enormous commitment and commitment over time. But beyond that, Tom, I don't want to get in to try to postulate how many brigades or when we would start to do something like that, so --

Q (Off mike) -- U.S. troops?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Oh, I wouldn't even -- I'm not going to hazard that kind of thing, so -- hi, Barbara.

Q Hi. The car bombs that you talked about, the spectacular attacks -- number one, do you have any way to tell us how much they have increased, perhaps, since the first of the year? Do you have any evidence of Iranian involvement at this point in any of these networks that are doing these massive car bombs?

And you spoke about Iran being extremely unhelpful. You said you had new information in the last month. What you have learned about Iran's involvement?

GEN. PETRAEUS: The Iranian involvement has really become much clearer to us and brought into much more focus during the interrogation of the members -- the heads of the Qazali network and some of the key members of that network that have been in detention now for a month or more.

This is the head of the secret cell network, the extremist secret cells. They were provided substantial funding, training on Iranian soil, advanced explosive munitions and technologies as well as run of the mill arms and ammunition, in some cases advice and in some cases even a degree of direction.

When we captured these individuals -- the initial capture, and then there have been a number of others since then -- we discovered, for example, a 22-page memorandum on a computer that detailed the planning, preparation, approval process and conduct of the operation that resulted in five of our soldiers being killed in

Karbala.

It also detailed -- there are numerous documents which detailed a number of different attacks on coalition forces, and our sense is that these records were kept so that they could be handed in to whoever it is that is financing them. And there's no question, again, that Iranian financing is taking place through the Quds force of the Iranian Republican Guards Corps.

As you know, there are seven Quds Force members in detention as well. This involvement, again, we learned more about with the detention of an individual named Sheibani, who is one of the heads of the Sheibani network, which brings explosively formed projectiles into Iraq from Iran. His brother is the Iranian connection. He is -- was in Iraq. And that has been the conduit that then distributes these among the extremist elements again of these secret cells and so forth.

Those munitions, as you know, have been particularly lethal against some of our armored vehicles and responsible for some of the casualties, the more tragic casualties in attacks on our vehicles.

So I think that's what has taken place.

Sure.

Q May I formally ask you: What is your assessment at this point? Do you believe that the central government of Iran, Ahmadinejad himself, perhaps, is, number one, aware of this, supporting it, directing it? What is the central government involvement? Could this level of activity possibly take place without the Iranian leadership knowing about it?

And just as another point, do you see any involvement beyond EFPs? Are they now involved in these spectacular suicide car-bomb attacks?

GEN. PETRAEUS: I don't think we have found a link to the spectacular car-bomb attacks, which we believe are generally al Qaeda and elements sort of connected to al Qaeda. Typically, in fact, still we believe that, oh, 80 to 90 percent of the suicide attacks are carried out by foreigners. That's a network, again, that typically brings them in through Syria and is again a major concern and certainly a hope that Syria will crack down on the ability of people to come through their airport and so forth and then be brought into Iraq.

With respect to how high does it go and, you know, what do they know and when did they know it, I honestly cannot -- that is such a sensitive issue that -- and that we do not -- at least I do not know of anything that specifically identifies how high it goes beyond the level of the Qods Force, Commander Suleiman. Beyond that, it is very difficult to tell -- we know where he is in the overall chain of command; he certainly reports to the very top -- but again, nothing that would absolutely indicate, again, how high the knowledge of this actually goes. So --

Q General Petraeus, you said that things may get worse before they get better in this effort. Can you expand a little on what the American and Iraqi public should be potentially braced for?

And are higher U.S. casualties inevitable as a result of your new approach? You mentioned that your losses have gone up since you moved into the neighborhoods. Is that likely to continue? Is that something they should also be braced for?

GEN. PETRAEUS: I mentioned this because as you move into areas that you've not operated in before, as you contend with elements that were in those areas that in some cases were not challenged -- I mean, there are some element -- areas that were -- that had become, to some degree, sanctuaries for certain extremist organizations.

As that takes place, I think there is a very real possibility that there's going to be more combat action and that, therefore, there could be more casualties, and that's really all that I am implying with that. I don't want that to become the central message of this by any means.

But I think that when you are expanding your forces, when you're expanding your forces' presence, when you are going into areas that have been very lightly populated with coalition forces in the past, that there is going to be more action. And as we take on elements again that in some cases were unchallenged, that that will take place. And certainly Iraqi forces will be our partners in all of that and have been all along so far.

Q General, a clarification and then a question. In regards to this 22-page memorandum that you said was seized in one raid, was that in reference to the number of American soldiers who were sort of ambushed and kidnapped and then killed?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yes.

Q And were you saying that there was evidence of Iranian involvement in that operation? I just want to be clear.

GEN. PETRAEUS: No. No. No. That -- first of all, that was the operation that you mentioned, and we do not have a direct link to Iranian involvement in that particular case.

Q And then, my question, regarding the fact that you said any success depends largely on the Iraqi government. Yet when what appears to be a key part of the early surge strategy is the erection of this -- what you called the concrete caterpillar, the 12-foot wall, that separates Sunni and Shi'a --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yeah, this is not to separate Sunni and Shi'a.

Q Okay.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Let me use my point of personal privilege here to interject that. Let me just explain, in fact, if I could, and then I'll actually give you a chance to finish that question, Nick, if I could.

The concrete caterpillar, the Arizona creeper, whatever you want to call it, there really are a number of these throughout Baghdad. It is part of an overall effort that is designed to make neighborhoods, markets, areas of congestion safer for the Iraqis who live in those areas, work in them, shop in them and so forth.

I think I mentioned that it includes Operation Safe Neighborhood, Operation Safe Market.

Safe Market is one that -- where we focused first on the two biggest markets in Iraq -- the Shorja market and the Jadriya market. These have tens of thousands of Iraqis in them during their peak hours on a daily basis, and they were subject to car bombs before the Baghdad security plan began. And so with the Iraqis we sat down, and they designed a way of putting barriers around it so that you could limit access to it by vehicle. And they actually shut it off to vehicles during the hours that the market is in full swing, and they can only go in during the early-morning hours to set up and then after the market's closed to tear down and take out the trash and so forth. That's been done now for a vast number of markets, not just in Baghdad but in other cities as well.

There are similar efforts ongoing to enable better control of vehicular movement, checkpoints all over Baghdad. There's a proliferation of checkpoints. They've become increasingly elaborate to provide better throughput, better protection for the Iraqi soldiers who typically are the ones that are manning these.

Another effort: There is a Safe Neighborhood Initiative. Again, a number of different neighborhoods, and you can actually focus on where they need to be. You can look at the density, the plots if you will, of where there

are sectarian murders taking place. And you array that for a week, for a month, what have you, and you can identify the areas in which there are cells operating.

And so when you're going to then go into that neighborhood, clear it, and clearing takes a long time. It's taking us 19 days just to clear Mansour district alone, for example, one of the central districts in Baghdad. You then have to be able to hold it, or else it is -- the clearing operation was not of enduring value. You can't hold it if you cannot control access to and from that particular neighborhood.

In most cases, actually, the neighbors welcome that kind of barrier plan or walls or what have you. And in many cases this has given the confidence to people in those neighborhoods to return to them, because now they are actually walled off from bad guys, from extremists, and that is what it is that we are trying to wall off. In some cases the walls are indeed along sectarian faultlines; in some cases they are just walling off neighborhoods that are mixed neighborhoods. Again, it depends on the geography of the neighborhood, not on the sectarian demographic breakdown.

The issue in this case, and the reason Adhamiya became a cause for concern is because it is a very old neighborhood, as many of you know who have been there, and it has one of the historic Sunni-Arab shrines in Iraq in it, a very old mosque. And that raised sensitivities that access to that was being walled off, and so forth. And so there was consideration given; our commanders with Iraqi commanders have looked hard, how can you achieve, again, population control without having some kind of obtrusive barrier, and so forth. And that is ongoing now.

So that's what it is that Iraqis and we are trying to do. By the way, a large number of the work is being done by Iraqis, Iraqi contractors and some Iraqi military engineer units, and then other is being done by U.S. engineer elements.

But go ahead --

Q Yet it also raised strong objections from Prime Minister Maliki. So how successful can U.S. military operations be if they are subject to being politically undercut by the Iraqi government?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, I think it would be worth -- I think that that's probably worth seeking clarification on because there's been a little bit more of a meeting of minds I think on that in recent days.

Right here.

Q General, you talked about a Baghdad clock and a Washington clock. Can you explain what you mean by that? And is it your assessment that this war can be won on anything close to that Washington clock, and how would you envision -- what would that victory look like?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yeah, sure. You know, what I've said is that there's a Washington clock ticking -- and actually, to be fair to those in Washington, it's an American clock. And -- but that clock is moving and it's moving at a rapid rate of speed, and it reflects the frustration, impatience, disappointment, anger, and a variety of other emotions -- feel about the pace in Iraq and the situation in Iraq. And, you know, I am not immune to those emotions either, having given over two and a half years of my life to it, and watched a number of our soldiers give the last full measure of devotion to it. So we want to see faster progress, and again, that is understandable that that clock is moving pretty rapidly.

The Baghdad clock, for all the reasons that I mentioned, is not moving as rapidly. It is not enough, for example, to go to Prime Minister Maliki, who I do believe, as I mentioned, is someone who wants to lead and serve all Iraqis, but it's not enough to go to him.

He's not the Prime Minister Tony Blair of Iraq. He does not have a parliamentary majority. He does not have his ministers in all of the different ministries. They are from all kinds of different parties. They sometimes sound a bit discordant in their statements to the press and their statements to other countries. It's a very, very challenging situation in which to lead.

And so, as I mentioned to some of the congressional leaders yesterday in fact, we need to encourage and provide that -- those emotions to all Iraqi leaders, the key leaders of the key parties of the key blocs of the Shi'a, Sunni, Kurds and so forth, and again, the key elements within those blocs and leaders in the Council of Representatives, leaders of the presidency, leaders of the -- again, that is what is necessary. And they're all going to have to work together to make progress.

That's a tall order, but that is what does have to happen. They understand it. I think that a number of them are determined to do what is necessary to achieve resolution of these very difficult issues, but again, I make no bones about the challenges that are involved there.

Q You've mentioned a number of positive trends, most notably the reduction in sectarian violence, but there are negative trends.

GEN. PETRAEUS: And I mentioned those too, I think. Yup.

Q Could you give us some numbers to go with those that are an equivalent with the numbers you've given us for the reduction in sectarian violence?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Okay. No, but, actually, I think the level of violence has roughly been -- depending again on how you calculate these things -- but by our consistent method, the level of violence has generally been unchanged. There was a dip for a while --

Q (Off mike) --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Throughout the country -- that there was a dip for a while. It was coming down and that these sensational attacks of the past couple of weeks, and a couple of these chlorine bomb attacks, just because of the sheer number of people that end up going to a hospital, even though they may then immediately come out, in the case of the chlorine bomb attacks, tends to run those up.

So we have not seen a corresponding drop in the level of violence statistics that we have seen in the sectarian murder statistics.

The reason I focused on the latter, though, is because it is a very important metric for neighborhoods. I mean, if your neighborhood is subject to the kind of extrajudicial killing that plagued Baghdad as recently as January and still does plague some neighborhoods, obviously you cannot focus on much other than just survival. And of course that's what caused this displacement of, really, millions of Iraqis over the course of the last couple of years. And it is something that again you have to drive down if again there's to be the degree of confidence that can help them gradually put a few stitches back into the fabric of a society that has been torn by sectarian violence.

Q What about car bombs? Can I ask you about car bombs?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, that -- I factored that in there. I don't know that there's been an appreciable change, actually, in that. Again, it tends to be quite fluctuating. You know, the last couple of days, for example -- the previous two days after the horrific attack on our 82nd Airborne Division soldiers -- actually, it was backed down somewhat -- but again, it just tends to go in cycles, and we have not seen a definitive trend that I could report to you in that regard.

Yeah, right here.

Q Thanks. Sir, you said that success ultimately depends on the Iraqi government, and there's a reasonable chance that they won't come through with what they need to do, given all the complexities that you've laid out. What can you tell the American people? Why is it worth the continued sacrifice on the chance that the Iraqi government won't hold up this end of the bargain? And one of the things that I hear from people who are for the withdrawal or the phased redeployment is, how much worse can it get than it has been -- in 2006, 34,000 civilian dead?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, I think again it does come down to the implications of various options. And it can get much, much worse than it was. Right now it is -- I think it's fair to say a good bit better, but again, I am not trying in any way, shape or form to indicate that this is a satisfactory situation whatsoever.

I did mention again one metric that I think is an important one, it's one that we happen to focus on literally with our forces. But there are others -- again, the car bombs, and I did in fact identify that as one that has shown an area in which we obviously have to focus even more effort, because it has inflicted horrific casualties on Iraqis in particular.

So again, I think you have to ask, you know, just as I responded to Michael Gordon's question, what are the implications of various options? What do you think would happen? Of course, that depends on some assumptions about the situation, when it is that you carry out the various options. And I think that that's hugely important as one, again, thinks of these different notions for the way ahead.

Yeah, in the back there.

Q

General, if sectarian killings are coming down, are you seeing any evidence of people moving back into their old districts and Sunnis and Shi'as starting to live together again?

And secondly, your recommendations in September, are you willing to countenance the idea that you may have to say to the president, this is not working, we should pull troops out, or are you more likely to say things are not going well, here are the adjustments and strategies we need to make?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, on the latter one, I mean, I have an obligation to some wonderful young men and women in uniform, and a lot of civilians, by the way, who are serving in Iraq and who deserve a forthright assessment from the folks at the top about the situation on the ground, and that's what I'm going to provide.

Now, with respect to returnees, we're seeing small numbers, and that's, I think, what you heard me say in the statement. Again, I don't know that you would yet call it a trend. We have seen, again, some neighborhoods that were really depopulated, in which there have been the early signs of returns.

We have seen -- I mean, you look at a place, for example, like Dura, the Dura market down in East Rashid in Baghdad, a real difficult area, perhaps one of the toughest in all of Baghdad. I went on a couple of patrols the day after I took command back in February, and candidly, I was sort of shocked at what I saw in terms of what sectarian violence had done to Baghdad. And the Dura area in particular struck me because there was not a single shop open at all; and there now are -- I think it's over 200 and literally climbing every day.

The reason is because Iraqi and coalition soldiers hardened that market, located Iraqi and U.S. combat outposts right in the center of the market, and then on its periphery. And in fact, I walked through that area with a CNN reporter, in fact, a few weeks ago, and it has continued to expand over time down there despite attacks.

So there's a degree of resilience there as well.

But that's what we are seeing. And again, too soon, I think, to call that a trend, too soon to say that what we've done in just the first couple of months has -- with our Iraqi partners, again, enabled them to stitch together the fabric of society that was so torn.

Right here. Right.

Q General, the commander of Camp Cropper has been relieved and imprisoned for allegedly aiding the enemy. One, can you provide any more information about this? And two, to what do you attribute the apparent continuing problems with detainee operations?

GEN. PETRAEUS: He actually, I think, gave up command actually last fall, as I understand it. And I'm aware of his charges. But he is actually in Kuwait, which is where the case is being carried out. And as with any case that is ongoing, a senior commander can't comment because of the concern over command influence. And that's really where I'd have to leave that. I think that the command there has provided the details on the charges. Again, this is something that took place quite some time back, actually well before I came on the scene, and that's about all I know about that.

Q What can you say about --

GEN. PETRAEUS: With respect to the detainee operations, I think actually that we have learned an enormous amount the very hard way. I -- but I do think that we did make a number of corrections in the wake of Abu Ghraib and some of the other problems that we have had with detainee operations. We believe that those operations are quite humane. And obviously they're in somewhat marked contrast to those of al Qaeda and the extremists, who indiscriminately attack civilians and coalition and Iraqi security forces.

I saw the report by UNAMI, and we believe that there are numerous factual inaccuracies in that that actually need correct. And I'd actually welcome the opportunity to discuss this a little bit.

The administrative review process that MNF-I uses is really quite robust, and it has multiple checks and balances. The specific procedures that are followed by Multinational Force Iraq are based on those in the Fourth Geneva Convention, and they're well-rooted in generally accepted law of war principles, all of this supplemented and guided by the field manual that was published this past year, which governed the treatment of detainees, interrogation and so forth.

There is no 60-day period during which detainees are not allowed counsel, although normally there's a 30-day window before which visitors are allowed, although exceptions can be made in the case of an attorney.

After that, an individual can see his attorney. MNF-I maintains Detainee Assistance Center at its theater detention facilities, which again have come light years from where we were in the early days, but which, frankly, still need continued improvement, particularly in the sense that in some cases we have detainees who are truly maximum security type detainees, and we have to improve the facilities, in fact, to accommodate some of those individuals.

The Detainee Assistance Center facilities, the services are available to all detainees. We have the capability to refer a detainee to the Iraqi Bar Association, where he can obtain an attorney at the detainee's expense. Furthermore, the Iraqi government provides defense counsel to any detainee at no expense to the detainee at the time a detainee's case is referred to an investigative hearing at the Central Criminal Court of Iraq -- a process that, as you know, has been ongoing for some time. And additionally, a defense counsel will continue to be provided throughout all subsequent stages of that particular process.

Q General, last week -- you spoke about the progress in Anbar. Last week, Major General Olson, one of the leaders of the PRT efforts, raised a question about the Anbar effort, saying that the military has empowered tribal leaders potentially at the expense of democratic governance. I wonder if you think that's the case, and whether you would say at this point achieving stability and security and safety in Anbar has to be a greater priority than, you know -- than democratic governance.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yeah, first of all, I didn't see that statement. I'd be somewhat surprised if it's -- is it the Rick Olson who's the PRT -- or who is --

Q Yeah. He was just saying that bringing the tribes in obviously had its good effects, but it also potentially undercuts the -- you know, what will hopefully be the elected government of Anbar province.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, look, I think first of all that the tribal elements of Iraq are a fact of life, and that what Iraq eventually will have is some form of government that at least listens to and incorporates the views of tribes and sheikhs, particularly in an area like Anbar province. Now, it varies when you're in cities; the tribal influence is less.

But I think that, candidly, a mistake that we may have made in early days was not to pay enough attention to these very important elements of Iraqi society, which still play a very, very key role and are really, you know, a lot more than I think sort of the stereotypical view of tribes. I mean, each tribe generally has a construction company, an import-export business, and a trucking company as well. I mean these are entrepreneurs as well as tribes, and they provide a variety of services to the members of their tribes.

So I think, again, that what results in Anbar province will actually have the features of democratic governance representing the citizens of Anbar province and being responsive to them.

But among those elements to whom they are responsive will be certainly the sheikhs and the leaders of the major tribes in that area, because of the allegiance that the people give to them.

Anbar province made the progress that it did because of the courageous action of some sheikhs who said, enough, to the killing by al Qaeda of their brothers, sons, sheikhs and so forth. It started with Sheikh Sattar near Ramadi, working with Colonel Sean MacFarland. He came to Colonel MacFarland and said, I'd like to join the coalition in fighting against al Qaeda, and they made a pretty courageous choice. He volunteered some of his young men to be part of the Iraqi police structure, and it literally just started to ripple on out from there, with each sort of contiguous tribe joining in the same fashion. And what you have now is a very, very significant movement.

By the way, that tribal movement is now turning into a political movement. And Sheikh Sattar had a meeting with a number of the tribal leaders just, I think it was, last week, where they came together to discuss when provincial elections are held, as the process moves forward in Anbar province, should this effort that has been focused largely on helping the security forces be moved forward also as somewhat of a political movement? And in fact, Prime Minister Maliki went out there, as I think you know, to Ramadi and met with not just the governor or the provincial council but also with the sheikhs and with the leaders of the Iraqi security forces.

Again, none of this would have been possible without these sheikhs, particularly the early ones, taking a very courageous stand at a time that was actually very, very dangerous, and has now enabled the Iraqi and coalition forces in partnership to largely clear Ramadi, which only two months or two-and-a-half months ago was largely al Qaeda central. And just to get to the governance center, you literally had to fight your way downtown.

Q Just to follow up, General, do you think the tribes are -- are they working with the U.S. military or are

they working with the central Iraqi government? And if the U.S. was to reduce its presence in Anbar, would that -- would these gains erode, with the --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, again, we have been very careful to ensure that these individuals are incorporated in Iraqi security force formations. As you may know, just a few months back, six months certainly back, when the call went out for volunteers for the 7th Iraqi Army Division, a division from about Ramadi on out into Western Anbar, there were just -- I think it was less than the fingers on these two hands who volunteered that day. And then subsequent one, there were a few more. Well, most recently there were 2,000 young Anbari men who showed up to volunteer for that when they had a recruiting drive at Habbaniya, I think it was. So there has been an enormous shift.

By the way, I found the same enthusiasm in Western Nineveh province, an area that I knew from the first year there with the 101st Airborne Division, met with the sheikhs of the Shammar tribe up there.

And these are individuals who sadly in the period of the most intimidation by al Qaeda of Sunni Arabs in the fall of 2004 and well into 2005, the period when they boycotted the election and so forth, and really now know that they lost out -- we could not get volunteers from those particular tribes. Now they want to help form new battalions and so forth.

Now, this is not just because they want to fight against al Qaeda. It is also because of a very good and realistic appraisal of this situation, and that is that the Sunni Arabs lost out by not participating in the past. They lost influence in government. They lost influence, if you will, or participation, jobs in the Iraqi security forces, and I think they now recognize that they need to participate, they want to participate. And that is a very, very important development, again. And once again, this never could have -- the progress in Anbar would not have happened without that.

If you now trace down the Euphrates River Valley and start out at al Qaim and Husaybah and walk your way on in and Haditha, Hit, Ramadi, and then over towards the Fallujah area, you get all the way until past Ramadi. This is not to say al Qaeda's still not trying to blow up newly in-place police stations in Ramadi, they did it the other day; nor that they are taking any of this lying down.

In fact, the areas around Fallujah are still quite problematic and are areas where the new Marine battalions -- this is an example of an area that I talked about, where we had not had a sustained presence in the past, where we are now able to have a sustained presence because of our additional forces and because of the expansion of Iraqi security forces in Anbar province. And we're going to expand in some other areas in that area here in the months ahead as well.

So that's the dynamic that's going on, and I suspect in truth that Rick probably did not mean quite the way that you may have characterized that, Julian.

Thanks.

Yes?

Q Sir, could you elaborate a little bit more on the benchmarks you'll be reviewing in your September assessment that even Joe Six-pack or armchair generals could understand? Is it possible that the number of spectacular attacks could continue throughout the summer, and yet you still see progress -- effort to buy time for the Iraqi government?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yeah, I -- this is something we've actually been working on a good bit, and in fact, we gave to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs yesterday a set of what we are sort of thinking about. Now I need to do more coordination.

Ryan Crocker and I are proceeding on this. We need to do some more ciphering on this and do some more thinking on it. But, you know, we provide an enormous wealth of detail right now that goes into the 9010 Report, the quarterly report that goes into weekly joint staff metrics and a whole variety of other submissions.

And with respect to that, we will probably focus on four areas: security, economics, politics/governance and rule of law.

In the security arena, you're looking at, you know, what is it that would show you that you have been able to achieve, to help the Iraqis achieve greater population security? What about the influence of militias and what about the progress of the Iraqi security forces?

When you look at the -- sort of the economic arena, again, we're looking for things that show that the Iraqis are into this big-time, which we believe they are, but also show that our approach is having the effect that we hope that it will have. But in the economic arena, how are they doing spending their money?

As you know, last year, the Iraqis did not spend some \$10 (billion) to \$12 billion of their budget for -- a year in which the International Monetary Fund was going to allow them to run a 5 percent deficit, which is common for countries that are sort of coming out of the situation in Iraq -- which Iraq finds itself. So this is very important, that they in fact spend the money that they have for all Iraqis, for the good of them.

And as you know, much of what is done for Iraqis, the whole social safety network, which is very substantial but which is torn and frayed in a variety of different locations where the security situation's been tough, this is all done through the ministries. And so they've got to spend their money. So we'll look at how are they doing in spending the budget, in particularly what about the capital investment account? They're good at spending salaries; the question is, are they buying the equipment, making the improvements, the construction and so forth.

What about banks? How are the banks doing? Are they reopening? And an interesting phenomenon, by the way -- there is now private banking in Iraq for the first time, I believe, ever, or at least certainly in a few decades. And I noted -- I just saw where there's private banks in Kirkuk. There's, believe it or not, a private bank, I think, in Ramadi or in someplace in Anbar province, maybe Haditha.

So again, how are they doing -- how are the provinces doing in receiving their money and, again, in spending it? Is the government doing all that it can for all provinces and all Iraqis?

Politics and governance -- obviously there we're talking about progress on key legislation. I've talked about that. You're looking at what about if there are some malign actors in some places in government? I mentioned that the deputy minister of Health was detained with the -- at the direction of the prime minister, I believe -- certainly his support, the head of the facility protection security forces -- that kind of activity, again, is what we're looking on there, and then just sort of the progress in the development of governmental capacity, ministry development.

And then in the rule of law, how is progress on the development of the criminal justice system, their detention facilities and system -- which is a big, big challenge and they have had big problems in that, as you know, in the past, particularly during the period when sectarian -- where certain Iraqi security force elements really were hijacked by sectarian militias as well. How is the Rule of Law Green Zone coming along and other initiatives, the circuit rider judicial effort and some of these things? So again, that's roughly what we're looking at.

As I mentioned, we just first gave a first draft pre-decisional think piece to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs yesterday. The Joint Staff and everybody else will work it. Ambassador Ryan Crocker and I need to do some more work on it as well, and then we will move it forward.

Q (Off mike) -- progress are less than obvious to a person in the United States, much less Iraq or Europe. Is it possible that these things could improve while spectacular bombing attacks still occur in parallel?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, I think first of all -- look, I think you have to be realistic and acknowledge there is going to be a continuation of some level of sensational attacks. In an environment where to prevent those, you know, the Iraqi and coalition forces have to protect everything and they only have to attack one thing, some of that is going to happen. I used the analogy the other day of Northern Ireland, which some of you are very familiar with and in which for some decades there was a level of violence that actually the Northern Ireland citizens learned to live with, really.

And actually, to be fair to the Iraqis, I mean they're an exceedingly resilient people. I actually the other night was talking to one of your colleagues from The Washington Post and talked about this idea that there is -- you know, we feel this incremental progress; it's very difficult to demonstrate. In fact, the progress is interesting, because it's a negative. It means nothing happened, in most cases. In other words, there were not sectarian murders. Whether that is newsworthy before it goes on for several weeks is obviously arguable.

But anyway, so what I asked was, "Hey, come on, it's about dusk, let's go -- we'll fly around the city a little bit." And we flew around. And so -- I mean, it was unbelievable.

This is a day in which I think there was a car bomb in Iraq, some of Iraq's seven million citizens were affected by that, but you could not have told that from what we saw over the city. There were three big amusement parks operational. I'm talking about, you know, roller coaster kinds of -- these are not just a couple little merry-go-rounds in small neighborhood parks. Restaurants in some parts of the city were booming. Lots of markets were open. The people were on the street. There were -- there had to be a thousand soccer games ongoing. They're watering the grass in various professional soccer fields -- the soccer leagues.

You know, all of this is actually so foreign, I think, in the mind of most people who see the news and of course do see that day's explosion or something like that. And actually there is a city of seven million in which life goes on, and again, citizens are determined to carry on with their life.

Just one more, please.

Q General, I'm sorry. I have to try one more time on the 22- page memo, because it seems like the first time you mentioned it, you said you found it in the computer of the cell that was dealing with Iran.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Right.

Q And I thought you said that they were saving it in order to demonstrate to their Iranian patrons that they --

GEN. PETRAEUS: That's our speculation. Now, what I --

Q (Off mike.)

GEN. PETRAEUS: No, what I said to Mik was, we did not -- we have not seen evidence of direct Iranian involvement in that case. If you said -- I mean, in other words, coaching them on how to do it, telling them to do it or what have you. Again, we don't --

Q Or bragging, then, reporting back about an operation --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yeah. We think -- again, this is speculation, but I think it is fairly logical

speculation. We think that records are kept so that the individuals that carry out these attacks can demonstrate what they're doing to those who are providing the resources to them, providing the additional funding, training, arms, ammunition, advanced technologies and so forth. So --

Q Not necessarily involvement in that specific operation? From the Iranians, I mean.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Again, not direction, not -- again, we just can't confirm it. I can't say it wasn't there either, but we did not find, if you will, a direct fingerprint to it.

Thank you all very much.

Q But there is a connection between that group and the Iranians?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Oh, there's no question that the Qazali network is directly connected to the Iranian Qods Force, received money, training, arms, ammunition, and at some points in time even advice and assistance and direction. So --

Q And they're the ones who carried out the Karbala attack?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yes. That network's members did carry out that.

Thanks. Great to see you all again.

Q Thank you.

Q Thank you, General.

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