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**Presenter: Lieutenant General Martin Dempsey, Former Commander, Multinational Security Transition Command-Iraq**

**June 13,  
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**DoD Press Briefing with Lt. Gen. Dempsey from the Pentagon Briefing Room, Arlington, Va**

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, good morning. I'm told they're not going to introduce me because I don't need an introduction. That's what they tell me, so I'll take them at their word.

I will tell you that I'm just completing, as you know, my tour as the commanding general of MNSTC-I and the NATO training mission in Iraq after 22 months. I'm back two days. Spent yesterday over on Capitol Hill. And I knew that I couldn't possibly go on leave without saying good-bye to the Pentagon press corps. So here I am.

And that's the sum total of my opening remarks, and I'll take your questions.

**Q** General Dempsey, yesterday you discussed briefly the problem of getting enough qualified Iraqi leaders, and you made a reference to -- I think you called it the pool of qualified recalls is beginning to thin out. Could you elaborate on what you meant by that and what the significance of that problem is for the next coming year or so?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Sure. As you know, there were hundreds of thousands of officers in the former regime. And over the course of time, we have actually, with the minister of defense in particular, but also the minister of interior, done recalls for certain skilled officers at certain ranks. And what we found is that in the early days of those recalls -- I think they've done four now. In the early days, we would probably end up taking in a pool, and after the qualifications and vetting, and so forth, we might end up with about 50 percent of what we recalled. That's now down to about 25 percent. So if we --

**Q** (Off mike) --

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, it's age, it's -- you know, they've been out of the game for four years.

Many of them have become physically -- you know, unqualified in that period of time. And so literally, if we were accepting 50 percent of those that showed up two, two-and-a-half years ago, now it might be 25 percent, which is a clear indicator that that pool is thinning out.

**Q** And a solution to that is?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, the solution to the leadership challenge in general is that -- and we're in discussion with the Iraqi minister of defense on this point. The young officers that are in the fight have a -- you know, have lived a lifetime of experiences in the last three years, and we think that they can reduce the pin-on point, for example. They've got a pretty peacetime-centric set of personnel policies now. You need two years Time-In-Grade and 18 months time -- you know, and three years, four years time of service, and we think that some of that can be abbreviated and allow them to pin on higher ranks sooner. That's one answer.

Secondly, we can reach out, they can reach out to the universities and take, if we can get them, some college graduates and put them through a shorter academy experience. The typical academy experience is a nine-month Sandhurst model, but we think something between four and six months for particular skills, in particular some of the technical skills -- logisticians, communicators and so forth. So there are answers.

Yes, sir.

Q You mentioned yesterday there is an annual attrition in the army and in the police. Would you please give us more details on that?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, yeah, I mean, we studied the size of the force that we knew we had grown, the size of the force that we knew was on the payroll, and a personnel asset inventory physically on the ground counting heads and came to the conclusion that the attrition in the army was 15 percent approximately, as I mentioned yesterday, and 20 to 22 percent in the police forces, which actually didn't surprise us, because as you look across historical trends for nations in conflict of the kind of conflict facing Iraq, that's -- that -- it fell right into the band that we thought.

That was an important piece of information for us, though, because we have to make sure that the Iraqi government has the ability to replenish their ranks and a training base that will allow them to do it in a timely fashion.

Q Welcome back.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Hi Pam.

Q Could you straighten us out on how big the Iraqi army is supposed to get? There's a 45,000 increase that the Iraq government said, there's a 20,000 that General Petraeus suggested, and then you also suggested that it could grow again in 2008. How big does it need to be?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah, first of all, don't set the bar that high. It's impossible that I could straighten you out on any of these issues, but I will elaborate, if you'd like.

Q Sure.

GEN. DEMPSEY: First of all, nothing we do is done without the concurrence of the Iraqi government. So although General Petraeus suggested this 20,000 increase, it was discussed and accepted by the minister of defense.

But let me back up. When we studied the Iraqi security forces in the spring of 2006, we came to the conclusion with them that there were -- that additional growth was necessary, because we foresaw the need for them to begin moving units around the country, to come to places like Baghdad and that when you move them around, we anticipated that we would learn some lessons about how many they would leave behind; how many would refuse to come, potentially; how do you account for the protection of the facilities that they're uncovering. And with the minister of defense and the prime minister, we decided that they needed about 25 more battalions and slight increases in other capabilities, notably aviation, intelligence, forensics on the police side. It

came to about 45,000.

That became the 2007 growth plan, funded primarily by the government of Iraq, but of course helped by us, in terms of building the training base and so forth.

As we entered into Fard al-Qanun -- that is, the current Baghdad security plan -- about the beginning of '07, and some of these units coming to Baghdad came at even less strength than we thought they would -- General Petraeus took a look. We were already building combat battalions to be 110-percent strength, and he suggested that we take a look at bumping it to 120-percent strength, so that they could still leave enough force back in their -- in -- you know, this is a counterinsurgency environment around the country, and the fear was, if you uncover one area, the enemy -- you know, just like a baseball will find the weak infielder, the enemy will find the weakness you leave in the battlespace.

And so we suggested to the minister of defense that he add about another 10 percent for each combat battalion, to bump it to 120 percent, thereby ensuring that they would get about 85 percent boots on the ground in Baghdad when they're needed, and elsewhere as well.

And so we made sure that the training base was capable of generating it, we made sure that the Iraqi budget was capable of absorbing it, and off we went. So that's the 2007 growth plan.

Now we are -- another in-stride assessment this spring, not yet publicized, briefed to General Petraeus, briefed to Admiral Fallon, suggesting that given the lessons of Fard al-Qanun in particular, the Baghdad security plan; given the levels of violence, which remain elevated; given that at some point we should anticipate a declining a U.S. presence and should build the Iraqi army forward in anticipation of that, that some additional growth will be necessary in 2008. It was characterized in the paper today that I said "big boost." I didn't say "big boost." What I said was some growth of scope and scale about the same as we did in 2007.

Jeff?

Q General, yesterday during your testimony you said that -- and I'm paraphrasing here -- that it appeared unlikely that the Iraqis could achieve reconciliation in the short term and -- but they might be able to reach accommodation.

What do you mean by accommodation? And is that lowering the bar?

GEN. DEMPSEY: No, I don't think so. I think it may be -- I mean, this is a personal opinion, Jim, formed after three years in Iraq and two years in Saudi Arabia. So I want to make sure I'm not establishing policy or changing the nature of the discussion here.

But I think there's probably an interim step toward reconciliation that might better be described as accommodation. And what I mean by that is that they have to find ways to become dependent on each other. Hydrocarbon law is the classic case of that, where you equitably distribute the resources of the nation, thereby encouraging these three groups to depend on each other for some common commodity.

I think security is that way. I think, if we can get the national forces of Iraq, in particular the army, the national police, the directorate of border enforcement, to continue to see themselves as national institutions, then the nation becomes somewhat interdependent. And that's what I meant by -- they will accommodate each other probably before they reconcile.

Q General, you have suggested that the Iraqi security forces needs to grow. But the problem seems to be that the Iraqi security forces that area already there are not performing. This is evidenced in a recent operation called Babylon Sweep. A small army transition team was abandoned by their Iraqi army and police

counterparts.

How is growing the Iraqi security forces going to help when what you have right now isn't working?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, I would reject your characterization, based on one isolated incident, that what we have there is not working. I mean, I could cite incidences in Mosul in particular where the Iraqi army and police, with one coalition battalion, are controlling the second largest city in Iraq, and cases where vehicle-borne suicide bombers are stopped routinely at checkpoints and never make it to their target. So I think if -- I would accept the fact that there is -- there are mixed results around the country, depending on what kind of local pressures are brought to bear in different parts of the country, depending on whether it's in a homogenous area or a mixed area.

But the simple fact is that in answer to your question about, why growth, why additional growth -- is that a counterinsurgency and a counterterror environment, are manpower-intensive. We tend to offset the size of our force with technologies. If you don't offset them with technologies, and believe me, the Iraqi security forces are not yet capable of offsetting their needs with technology, then you have to offset it with additional manpower. That's number one.

Number two, what we've learned is that this force is actually fighting very well, and the security forces of Iraq are suffering KIA and WIA in greater numbers than we are, certainly. And we've got to make sure that over time they have sufficient depth in their formations so that they can pull units offline from time to time and reconstitute and retrain them.

In other words, we've got to make sure that the Iraqi government recognizes the need to train while in contact with the enemy or it won't continue to develop. To do that, you've got to have enough depth that you don't uncover something while you're pulling a unit off line to train it.

Q Can I follow up? Given your comments yesterday to lawmakers about the problems with attrition, the problems you outlined, can you say that the Iraqi security forces as a whole are performing to the level that they need to be?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Very broad question that will elicit a broad answer: Yes.

Yeah.

Q General, yesterday -- I'm going to paraphrase; forgive me, because I was typing as quickly as possible while you were testifying. You said something to the extent: If I sound cautiously optimistic, it may be I've been there too long, but in the process of being there too long, I've gained a certain faith in Iraq that I didn't gain in other parts of the region.

As you know, this morning the 3rd Battalion of the Salahuddin province police was detained. This was the battalion that was guarding --

GEN. DEMPSEY: In Samarra?

Q -- the Samarra mosque. I'm wondering if it's cautious to be optimistic or if it's somewhat incautious to be optimistic at this point, when you look at this situation and think about all of the ethnic rivalries in the police and the army.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Mm-hmm. I'm not sure I understand the concept of "incautious optimism" to tell you the truth. There might be "imprudent optimism."

But no, I stand by what I said yesterday. I mean, despite all of the problems that I've seen them confront -- and I've seen them confront enormous problems over the last three years. And, you know, when you talk about what's different now that has changed over the course of my time there, the number of things we were doing for them in 2003, which is essentially everything we were doing for them, to what they are now capable of doing themselves, whether it's mundane things like pay and promote, provide medical care, provide life support, enter into reasonable contracts to procure -- none of that existed three years ago.

And so you've got a system now that is literally that; it is an institution that is growing, not just a bunch of tactical units largely unconnected. Three years ago, the tactical units were out there, not in large numbers, but they were out there. They were partnering with the coalition. But they didn't feel any loyalty to anything called the government of Iraq or an institution called the ministries of defense and interior. Those institutions now exist and the loyalties are clearly aligned to the ministries in a way that did not exist three years ago.

That causes me to believe that this enterprise will continue to improve, and that's the source of my optimism.

Yeah?

Q General, commander -- American commanders in Iraq now have authority -- sort of case-by-case authority, I gather, to reach out to tribes and mostly Sunni tribes, I think, but in some cases to arm them. I'm wondering as someone who until recently was responsible for training police and army units, whether that concerns you and how you make sure those new pop-up police units, in some cases, are tied to the government.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, that's -- that last phrase is clearly the key to making local initiatives contribute in the long run to security, is tying them at some point to the central government. But I think we've got to look at what's happened in Al Anbar and consider that it has the potential to make a profound impact in Al Anbar. Now it doesn't mean that that template can be taken to Diyala province. Al Anbar is Sunni almost exclusively; Diyala is mixed, almost 50-50. The template probably won't be passed across.

But we have to see what's happened in Al Anbar at this point as a very positive thing and try to learn from it. I mean, six months ago there were 50 attacks a day in Al Anbar; now the number is five or six a day, one or two of which is effective. So the change in Al Anbar has been profound, but it does need to be scoped, it does need to be tied to the center so that at a very minimum -- again, those loyalties accrue where the paycheck, you know, emanates from.

Q Are you satisfied, though, that the scoping is adequate at this point, and how's it being done? I mean, can you explain it?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, as I departed, the scoping was ongoing, and the scoping was being done with leaders from Al Anbar meeting with Multinational Force-West, meeting with, in this case, my Coalition Police Advise and Transition Team, CPATT, and with the ministry of interior; because what they've got to determine is how much headroom they have in their budget, and so -- because they don't want their payroll costs to so consume their budget that they can't do anything by the way of infrastructure development or capital expenditures. That scoping was ongoing as I left.

Q Generally you know about the security around the mosque in Samarra.

What's your read on the situation? How do you think it -- you know, what does it tell you about the security there?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah, I mean, I try not to -- you know, if -- somebody told me you can take me out of Iraq but you can't take Iraq out of me, so, you know, I look at the paper and I -- you do start to try to determine

what do you think happened. But it really is not any longer my responsibility nor would it be appropriate for me to say. It clearly seems to me to be a signature attack of al Qaeda, but how it occurred, I think I'd rather not comment on.

I'm sorry, yeayh.

Q Sir, can I get back to the current security plan in Baghdad? We've seen the percentage of manpower of the arriving Iraqi battalions gradually go up to where they were also over 90 percent, but obviously there's going to be a rotation at some point where new units come in. How concerned are you that the units that were sent in now were the most deployable, and as you get replacements in, we're going to see those percentages of manpower start falling off again as perhaps less deployable or less able -- units are --

GEN. DEMPSEY: Oh, I'm absolutely convinced that's exactly what we'll see, and it is exactly why we're doing it. There is a -- I mentioned it yesterday -- there is always a bit of tension between tactical efficiency. I mean, we could leave those units in Baghdad for a much longer period of time, thereby reducing the turbulence and probably making the tactical fight a little cleaner. But there's a strategic imperative here that we develop an Iraqi army that sees itself as an institution of national unity -- so you've got units that are predominantly Kurdish coming to Baghdad that contribute to the fight; you've got units from the south that are predominantly Shi'a coming to Baghdad that contribute to the fight working by side by side. That seems to me to be a strategic imperative of the future of the Iraqi security forces.

Similarly, we learn enormous lessons when we move them around. We learn about what their leaders are capable of, we learn about the degree of reliability and loyalty. In fact, you might make the case that even after the Baghdad security plan -- in fact, we will make the case that after the Baghdad security plan is behind us and there is no need to rotate units to Baghdad, the Iraqi military should still rotate units to a range complex east of Baghdad called Besmaya Range in order to stretch them out.

Our Army, by the way, became what it is in the '80s when we started deploying units to the National Training Center. And I remember being in a unit and saying, "Boy, I really don't want to do that, because they might actually see whether we can perform or not." And then that has become just part of our culture now, really, is deployments to the training centers, to have somebody shine a light in your eyes and see what you're made of, and that's a very good thing for this army.

Q Can I just -- (I'm ?) trying to follow this. Can you give us an idea of when we should expect that first unit that's there now to start rotating out?

I mean, I think you said yesterday --

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, we're on our third installment right now, and there's another rotation planned for July. I don't remember the details.

Q Are we already seeing the percentage of manpower falling off as they're arriving or --

GEN. DEMPSEY: No, because again, as I say, we learn lessons as we go. And what we've done now is we've got a pool of recruits and a pool of equipment at Besmaya Range, and we rotate from wherever they're coming -- I think this next group's coming from -- potentially from Kirkuk -- rotate them into Besmaya Range for two weeks of collective training, refit them, rearm them, count heads, replenish their ranks, train them, send them to Baghdad.

Yeah?

Q General, just setting the questions of manpower aside, could you speak a little bit more specifically

about the equipping side? Where do you see the shortfalls? Yesterday I think in your testimony you alluded a little bit to issues like the need for road clearance equipment, ISR assets, things like that. Where do you see this going?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Right. In this in-stride assessment we've done, it won't -- I mean, none of this will be a complete revelation. I mean, they need additional armor-protected mobility; they need the ability to transit Iraq's road networks in a safer vehicle than they've potentially had in the past. Now, they've got quite a number of armored personnel carriers and a very large number of up-armored humvees, but they need additional numbers of both of those things. They need some additional air transportation. We've suggested -- they've got three C-130s; we've suggested they need three more for a fleet of six. And we think we're on the way to help them procure that. They'll need additional ISR -- intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance capability. They've got two systems right now, and we think that probably nine is the right number. You know, we think that perhaps they're ready to make the move from a light mortar to something more like an artillery capability. We think they may be ready to have something like a cavalry unit to help along the borders, particularly along the Iranian-Syrian borders.

But all that's in the study and is all about helping them move from a force that is today very firmly focused on internal security, that will have to begin to account for the fact that at some point they'll need to protect themselves against external threat as well. And we think 2008 is when they'll start making that shift.

Q But just to follow, you had also mentioned, though, yesterday the lack of a professional civil service that can actually oversee procurement.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Right.

Q So, you know, how do you see this happening? How can they equip themselves?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, in the case of the -- well, first if all, recognizing that, we've built a Civil Service Academy for the Ministry of Defense right behind the ministry of defense headquarters. In fact, next time you're in Baghdad, you ought to visit it. And we've got contractors and a curriculum that trains them in the use of their system. You know, sometimes in the past we've trained them in what we think a system should look like. Oftentimes they slip back. And so we might teach them what we think is a proper budgeting cycle, and they go back and then try to impose our system on theirs and it just doesn't match.

We're training them to be bureaucrats inside of their system. That exists today. We're getting ready -- that was a proof of principle for us. We'll do the same thing for the ministry of interior in 2008.

But back to your question about, how do they equip themselves? They made the decision at the end of 2006 to enter into the foreign military sales program with the United States government, which essentially makes us their acquisition agents. And they've contributed \$1.7 billion at the end of '06, and this year they plan on investing \$1.6 billion.

Yeah.

Q General, you had said that on the whole Iraqi security forces are performing at the level they need to be. If that's the case, why can't the U.S. begin withdrawing forces from Iraq?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, that's a question that we study all the time. And, I think, what you'll find is that in the post-surge period, we'll see what happens with the surge. We've got to protect the population to give political progress a chance to catch hold, as well as some economic developments. And then, I think, based on what we learn about the security environment at that time, we'll make that decision.

Yeah.

Q General, I wanted to take a broader look, beyond the security forces, at the situation in Iraq. What do you see as the greatest challenge in moving forward over the next 6 to 12 months? And how worried are you that political pressures here at home will force a premature withdrawal of American forces?

GEN. DEMPSEY: First of all, you know, I have said, including yesterday, that the -- you talked about taking a broader view. I think we've got to reassess our vital national interest in Iraq and in the region. And then based on those vital national interests, that will be what determines the size and duration of our presence in Iraq. And I think that the Iraqi government is eager for that kind of discussion.

And I think that what we've got to do in the near-term here is, protect the population to give them -- right now they are consumed by the day-to-day bombings and the day-to-day level of violence and the day-to-day casualties. And what the surge is attempting to do is, give them a bit of space and time in which to consider the very things you're talking about. And that's why the surge is necessary, and that's what we hope it accomplishes.

Yeah, Jim.

Q But, general, given your extensive experience in Iraq, what is the likelihood, and how do you think, the Iraqis could achieve some kind -- the necessary political and security progress within that very narrow time frame that has been laid down here in Washington.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah. Well, I don't think we're looking for the completion of any of those benchmarks, but I think we're looking for a recognition on the part of the Iraqi government that those benchmarks are the path to the future in terms of their relationship with us and also important for their own increasing stability as a government, as a government as well as of a nation.

So, you know, I don't think it's going to be necessary that peace break out between now and September because that -- if that's the standard, then we're not going to achieve it. But I think what we're looking to see is movement in each of those benchmarks of a serious enough nature that causes us to believe that the Iraqi government can make a difference on those benchmarks over time.

Q Yesterday, you testified that there -- that the police lost somewhere between 8,000 and 10,000 officers. That's a big gap, 25 percent. Why are there not more specific numbers of how many police officers were killed? And do you think some are using that discrepancy as a way to keep those -- (off mike) -- on the payroll and continue to collect their pay?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah, I don't recall that that's the number I used. I may, in fact, have used that number.

But of course there are payrolls that are padded in both the ministry of interior and the ministry of defense. Now, as we put these automated databases in place that I mentioned in my testimony yesterday, we are learning and the Iraqi government is learning a great deal more about the degree to which payrolls may have been padded in the past. And Minister of Defense Bolani and his deputy ministers are very active and very firmly committed to cleaning that up. They're trying to clean up something that's existed for 40 years.

Q And how high did you think it is now? And what is being done to sort of to keep better track of those numbers in the meantime?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah. Well, we're helping by virtue of our embedding the policy transition teams that do -- that visit police stations with Iraqis and account for people and equipment, and then that's all reported back to the minister. And where he finds police chiefs that have done what we've just discussed, they get fired.

Yeah -- did I have you yet?

Q You did, yeah. (Laughter.)

GEN. DEMPSEY: Okay.

Q I think you had all of us yet.

GEN. DEMPSEY: I did.

Q Yeah.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Okay. Then Pam. (Laughter.)

Q Fair enough. (Inaudible.)

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah.

Q I have two questions. The first one is, could you go over for us the pattern of the battalions showing up and in what strength? Over the course of the Baghdad security plan, you've said that it was lower, actually, than you expected. And what did you notice? Were there ethnic groups that didn't show, or were the geographic areas that didn't show in the full numbers?

Would you also update us on the Karbala investigation? What happened there when your team was attacked and some of them were kidnapped and killed? How did they get into that base? Was it an inside job, or was it just a screw-up?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah. I can't help you much with the latter, because I wasn't involved with it, although I did -- I do recall General Petraeus discussing the fact that they actually were able to apprehend and in a couple of cases kill the perpetrators. But I can't answer that one, because I wasn't part of it.

I am very much a part of the first part of your question, which is, how have the deployments gone over time? We started trying to do this in August of '06, with the -- with one of the first Baghdad security plans, under Pete Chiarelli as the corps commander.

Those first units -- two of them actually refused to come, one from the north and one from the south -- complete refusal. And then the remaining battalions, which was four at the time, came in at about 50 percent strength.

We got our counterparts together, the Iraqi -- our Iraqi counterparts, and we determined that it had occurred for several reasons, principally that they hadn't been trained to deploy. You know, sometimes we mirror-image people, our counterparts, and we had decided that since we can deploy, they should be able to deploy.

And in fact there were some things that needed to be put in place to help them deploy. First was, we needed to have an order that was issued in a timely enough fashion that had a start date and an end date, so that they knew how long they'd be gone from their home stations -- sort of a fundamental issue, but one that had not been accomplished. Secondly, the minister of defense agreed to pay a deployment stipend for their period away from home. Third, we needed to help the unit that would be receiving them prepare to receive them. There was -- in those first days the unit would deploy into an area, the gaining unit in Baghdad didn't welcome them, and I don't mean "welcome" in the -- you know, in a traditional sense, but welcome them in the military sense, have a place ready for them to stay, have what they needed in terms of accommodations. And so we corrected all that.

The next tranche or installment that came to Baghdad came in -- all of them came, and they came in at between 50 and 60 percent strength. What we learned from that is that they were unwilling to uncover their battlespace completely in the rear -- reasonable. We learned that about 10 to 15 percent of them typically just simply refused to deploy and that they needed to be culled from the ranks. And we learned that the -- they still were executing their leave policy, which of course takes about 25 percent out.

That was what caused us to increase the strength of the battalions to 110-percent strength. Fard al-Qanun showed us that that wasn't enough; hence, we've gone to 120 percent strength. Most units in Baghdad now are sitting at about 75 percent strength, and we think with this new addition we can bump it up to about 85 percent strength.

Now, the headquarters are somewhat bloated. You know, they tend to -- this army reminds me a lot of my Army in the early '70s, to tell you the truth, where you might have the headquarters sitting at 250 percent strength and the battalions sitting at -- really at about 70 to 75 percent strength. So, you know, over time, we'll help them figure that out. But that's kind of the evolution of deployability in the Iraqi army.

Now back to you.

Q Now that you are -- you've wrapped up your time there, I would like to ask you to reflect on the army from sort of a broader perspective, which is to say, how much easier do you think your job would have been than the job of your predecessor, General Petraeus, in that position, had the army never been disbanded originally, had it allowed to remain in place. I mean, I recall in the summer of 2003 in Baghdad Ambassador Bremer saying that ultimately 40(,000), maybe a maximum of 70,000 soldiers will be part of the new Iraqi army. Now, we're talking about, if I remember your numbers correctly, by the end of this year about 400,000 security forces --

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah, about 170,000 in the army and 390,000 overall.

Q (Off mike) -- approaching a size as large, if not larger, than Saddam's --

GEN. DEMPSEY: Oh, no. He had a million men under arms. I mean -- so we're not even halfway there.

Q So I'm sort of wondering if you can sort of reflect on that, that some of those decisions that were taken early on -- I mean, how it impacted your job.

GEN. DEMPSEY: I have reflected on that often, and I found myself -- not to dodge the question, but I find myself seeing some benefits and some disadvantages in either course we may have followed.

Had we not disbanded them, we probably would have had the opportunity to handpick what we wanted a bit better because they wouldn't have dissipated. Perhaps the weapons storage facilities, the ammunition storage facilities would not have been subject to looting, perhaps the bases in which they lived would not have been subject to looting, all of which we've had to go back and reconstruct.

On the other hand, you know, as the Shi'a majority began to gain its political power, as it sees as somewhat of an entitlement now after several centuries of being the dominated majority, I think that it would have been almost impossible to leave that army in place because it was clearly seen as a -- not only a vestige of the past, but would have been seen as a threat to the government.

And so -- you know, I think that probably the disbandment was appropriate. It may have done -- we could have done it better, but I think at the end of the day it probably had to be done. That's where I am on it now.

Yeah?

Q Can I ask you, what is the plan for the training teams after the surge is completed? There was the thought, you know, late last year of greatly standing those teams, doubling the number of trainers, and my sense is that that is still sort of out there and is on the table and has been done in some cases, but that perhaps after the surge the idea would be to go back to that and really give those teams the ability to do 24-7 operations with their Iraqi counterparts. Is that the idea, and what is the time frame for that?

GEN. DEMPSEY: It was -- that was the idea, is the idea, is being done in parts of the country already, MND-North, in particular, and it is -- it was my advice to the planners of Multinational Force-Iraq, that as they conceive of the post-surge environment, that we reconsider both the size, but more important, the composition of the transition teams. And let me be a little more specific.

The transition teams in the past have been built to essentially help the Iraqi security forces draw upon enablers, notably fires, joint fires from the air, ground fires. What the Iraqi army needs the most help with in the future is administration and logistics. They need to be able -- they can call for fire, they can attack, they can defend, but they have a very immature system of administration and logistics. And so what we're hoping to do is influence that discussion as we get into the post-surge environment.

Ma'am.

Q As you know, in Baghdad a lot of residents sort of depend on armed factions to defend their neighborhoods in the absence of a government force, and now that you're out, I'd like you to sort of reflect on why do you think that those factions were able to get their forces organized and on the streets and able to defend those neighborhoods faster than the government forces. And what does that say about the kind of Baghdad that those forces would face when they were at that full level of maturity?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah, I think that when we take a look back, when history looks back on when did all that occur and how did it occur -- you recall that the government was elected on December of 2005, began to form in January of 2006 -- I might be off a month -- but didn't fully form, didn't fully sit, didn't fully function until probably late May, early June, and there was a six-month vacuum there, which was filled, as I look back on it, by the kind of influences that you're describing. And it's something, though, that everyone's aware of and everyone's working on, especially the two ministers.

By the way, though, the latest -- we sit through a quarterly Executive Assessment Board, and the latest assessment board, in a rather significant way, demonstrated that where six months ago the people in those neighborhoods you're talking about did say they would rather have a local militia force protecting them, now they say that they would rather have the Iraqi security forces protecting them. I think we may have turned the corner on that, although it's not irreversible. We've got to keep at that.

Yeah?

Q But at the same time, general, we have instances where the U.S. military is now supporting -- if not providing ammunition and arms and transportation -- to some of those very transition groups. Does that put the U.S. military operations there, if not the Iraqi military, on a sort of a dangerous slippery slope?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, at this point, Jim, it's not a broad campaign to arm militias nationwide; it's a very focused engagement activity in Al Anbar province and the district of Abu Ghraib in western Baghdad. And those areas, as I mentioned earlier, are fertile for that kind of intervention because they tend to be homogenous.

I think your question will be one of the questions we have to ask as we try to determine how to instill a sense of local security into mixed areas. But in the homogenous areas, I don't see the risk at this point as excessive or unreasonable.

Q But can I follow on that point, because both in answer to David's question and then to Mik's question you seemed relatively optimistic. But yesterday on the Hill, you seemed to be very concerned about, you know, monopolization of the legitimate use of power by the central government, making sure that's not undermined.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Sure.

Q And also seemed concerned that the motivations of these guys are unknown at this point and that, you know, we're handing them guns, we're not sure who they are.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Right.

Q Can you talk a little bit about the risks on this, because it sounded like on the Hill you were a little bit more skeptical.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah, well, I mean, you know, I remember one of you wrote about me at one time: "In a rare moment of candor, General Dempsey said." (Laughter.) So I'm always very careful to both express what I think are the potential benefits, but acknowledge the potential risks. And those risks that I mentioned yesterday, and you just recalled, are real, they're very real. But I think that where we are in the evolution of this initiative make it something we should certainly pursue, but not without keeping a very close eye on both their motivation and on the degree to which we're able to tie it to the center.

I'm not walking back from what I said. I do think, though, that in some cases in some parts of Iraq, stability will probably accrue from the bottom up, not from the top down.

Yeah?

Q General, when I asked about why U.S. forces couldn't withdraw, you had mentioned that there needs to be an assessment post- surge. Given that by September the surge forces will have been there less than three months --

GEN. DEMPSEY: Right.

Q -- does that give you enough time to adequately gauge if the surge has worked?

GEN. DEMPSEY: It doesn't give me enough time. And I'm not sure what it will do to General Petraeus. You'll have to ask him that question.

Q Well, would it give -- in your opinion, since you were in charge of training the Iraqis for so long, do you think that will give U.S. commanders enough time to gauge the effects of the surge?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Again, I don't know the answer to that question. I do know that when General Petraeus comes back, it will be an assessment that he's been already actively making. I mean, it's not that he'll wake up on the first of August and begin making his assessment. I mean, we're making this assessment as we go. And he and, in fact, Ambassador Crocker will have to answer that question.

Q And what's the assessment so far?

GEN. DEMPSEY: I honestly don't know, Jim. And I mean -- but I was -- my contribution to it focused on things like, and I'm sure General Jim Dubik's will as well, how are they doing in terms of reliability in Baghdad in particular; how are they doing in their willingness to deploy and their ability to deploy; how are they doing at tying national-level logistics to tactical-level logistics? So there are some -- I mean, you know, we do a monthly

assessment of the Iraqi security forces. Tactically it's done by Ray Odierno's transition teams, and then MNSTC-I does an institutional-level assessment that, by the way, when we brief it, we bring our Iraqi counterparts in, and we discuss with them those things, we think, that are going well, and those things that we think are not.

Q And would you give it a grade level so far, in terms of all those questions about how they're doing?

GEN. DEMPSEY: I would not, but thank you for the opportunity. (Laughter.)

STAFF: Thank you much, folks. Appreciate it.

GEN. DEMPSEY: All right, look, it's been a pleasure. First of all, I've been blessed by this mission. And I would never think to leave without telling you how proud you should be of America's men and women in uniform over there, working in an environment that is absolutely complex, dangerous, but vitally important. So I want you -- I thank you for your support of the American soldier, and also for treating me with kindness most of the time. Thanks.

Q Feel free to come back in your new job.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah, thanks a lot. (Laughter.)