



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

On the Web:

<http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=3966>

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

Public contact:

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

Presenter: Colonel Richard Simcock, Commander, Regimental Combat Team Six

May 18, 2007

Special DoD Briefing with COL Simcock on Ongoing Security Operations In Western Iraq from the Pentagon Briefing Room, Arlington Va.

BRYAN WHITMAN (deputy assistant secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Good morning. Good to see you all.

I see we have some good video. Let's check on our audio. Colonel Simcock, this is Bryan Whitman at the Pentagon. Can you hear me okay?

COL. SIMCOCK: Mr. Whitman, I hear you very well. Good morning.

MR. WHITMAN: Well, good afternoon to you, and thank you for sharing some time with us this morning here in the Pentagon. This is Marine Colonel Richard Simcock. He's the commander of Regimental Combat Team 6. And his RCT deployed from Camp Lejeune, where he has about 5,000 Marines, soldiers and sailors in his command and has been operating as part of Multinational Force-West since January of this year. And today he is speaking to us from Fallujah and he's going to give us a brief overview of what his command has been doing and then going to take some of your questions.

So with that, Colonel, let me turn it over to you.

COL. SIMCOCK: Mr. Whitman, thank you. And on behalf of the 6,000 Marines, soldiers and sailors here at AO Raleigh, it's a pleasure to speak with you this morning.

I wanted to give you a quick overview and tell you a little bit about Regimental Combat Team 6 -- and I know our time is limited -- and then give you all the opportunity to ask me some questions.

First off, let me say to you that I talk to a lot of media people, and I get the opportunity to tell them about what we're doing over here, our mission, and what we're trying to accomplish. And every time they ask me, are we winning and are we having success? The quick answer to that is yes, and there's various reasons for that.

The first one is that Regimental Combat Team 6 is the fourth in an iteration of regimental combat teams to operate in AO Raleigh. We have built on the success of those combat teams that have come before us. One of the biggest advantages I have now over my predecessors is the surge in forces that I'm sure you all are aware of. And as Mr. Whitman said, he thought I had 5,000 soldiers, sailors and Marines here, when reality is I have

over 6,000. That has allowed me to go into places that my predecessors just didn't have the troop levels to do. I can do more because I have more.

The second thing I'd like to talk about, and that's the governance aspect of what we're doing over here in AO Raleigh. AO Raleigh is obviously dominated by the city of Fallujah. And Fallujah is a city that three years ago during Al-Fajr Operation was almost destroyed. Anyone that was in Camp Fallujah at that time was either -- in the city of Fallujah at that time was either killed or captured. So Fallujah started from scratch.

Now, we're three years down the road, and the change is phenomenal. Fallujah is now a city of over almost 400,000 people. It is a city that is in Iraqi battlespace. It is controlled and run by the Iraqi 2nd Brigade. The 2nd Brigade commander is a Shi'a. He has a brigade that is a mixture of Kurds, Sunni and Shi'a. That brigade commander works shoulder to shoulder with a Sunni city chief of police. They work together to provide security to a duly elected mayor. That mayor is supported by a city council of 20 members. And Fallujah today is an operating city that is both economically strong and a flourishing city. That's not to say that it doesn't still have a lot of problems that we have to deal with, but comparatively of where it is today and where it was three years ago, it's a night-and-day difference.

The third thing I'd like to talk to you about is the tribal engagement piece. In AO Raleigh, we have four major tribes that surround the city of Fallujah, and we've made strong efforts to engage with the tribal leadership, because that's the way that Iraqis in AO Raleigh have governed themselves for thousands of years. We've made great strides in this area.

The largest tribe that we deal with is the Al-Bu Issa Tribe. It's probably a quarter of the battle space within AO Raleigh. We deal with them to provide a lot of the contracts and area improvements that we deal with over here. And probably most important is the information, by dealing with them on a day-to-day basis, that they give to us so that we can improve the security situation here within AO Raleigh.

Those three areas that we're dealing with today probably gives me the greatest advantage in comparison to my predecessors. But again, it's been pushing the pile of progress, if you will, that we've done over the last four years that has put us to the position that we're at right now.

So that's a very quick overview of AO Raleigh. I could go on, but I'm going to stop it there and give you all the opportunity to ask me your specific questions so I can get as much information to you in the short period that I have.

Thank you.

MR. WHITMAN: Well, thank you for that, and we'll go ahead and get started.

QQ Good morning, Colonel. This is Joe Tabet with Al Hurra. You mentioned in your statement that Fallujah is going well economically, but you mentioned too that you are facing problems in Fallujah. Would you please tell us more details about what kind of problems are you facing?

COL. SIMCOCK: That's a great question. I'm asked that a lot about progress, and I always answer that question with the statement that Fallujah is iconic. It has taken on iconic status both by us and by the people that we're fighting. As I said, Fallujah has a history to it. It's been fought over in major battles -- Al-Fajr probably being the highlight to that. Coalition forces killed many of our enemy in the city of Fallujah, and we're making great progress now in order to make the security situation there a lot better.

It's not perfect, and the people that we're fighting aren't giving up. It is my belief that within AO Raleigh, that will be the last victory that we'll have to win in AO Raleigh because they don't want to give up what has turned into the major hub of AO Raleigh. So they are still fighting us hard there, there's no doubt about that; but

with the cooperation, as I mentioned, with 2nd Iraqi Brigade, along with the Iraqi police in Fallujah, we are making great strides.

MR. WHITMAN: Tom, go ahead.

QQ Colonel, Tom Bowman with NPR.

I was in Anbar back in February and March, and talked to a lot of the Marine and Army leaders at that time. And you know, besides the tribal leaders getting on board, one of the problems when you talk to the tribal leaders is, they don't have faith in the central government in Baghdad for a couple of reasons. First of all, they're not getting the reconstruction money they were promised. And the other thing is, the provincial elections, which were supposed to be held in the spring, have now been kicked down to the earliest later this year.

I wonder if you could talk about both those issues. How much money is getting there, how much reconstruction money? How much more do you need? And how important do you think are the provincial elections to be held?

COL. SIMCOCK: Yeah, another good question.

One of the problems that they do have is money coming down from Baghdad. One of the successes, though, that we're having is the provincial support that we're getting from Governor Maamoon. Governor Maamoon has been here on approximately five to six different occasions. He has promised support, and he has come through with a lot of those promises in several projects that are being accomplished here.

In combination with that are projects that we are in fact doing in Fallujah, projects such as sewer projects, projects to improve the hospitals and clinics within Fallujah. There are a lot of -- again, a lot of progress being made. There are still a lot of problems on the Iraqi side, you know, administratively, the coordination, in order to get the support that they need coming down from Baghdad. There's no doubt about that. That still needs to happen.

QQ And on the elections?

COL. SIMCOCK: You know, that's one thing that -- it's on the horizon. And I think maybe more it's on our horizon, that we're looking to it. I don't see the tribal aspect of it, where they're as much concerned with it. I get a lot more talk about the elections coming up, more from the coalition side than I actually get from the tribal side.

QQ Colonel, Jeff Schogol with Stars and Stripes.

Can you talk about, what is the trend of murder and intimidation attacks against local officials inside Fallujah?

COL. SIMCOCK: Yeah, that is probably our number one concern right now. We have had four city councilmen killed in about the last year here. The terrorists, they use that as their number one weapon. It is their main tactic. They fear the government that is up and running in Fallujah. They know that eventually it will defeat them. The people of Fallujah are seeing the benefits that their city government within Fallujah is doing for them.

So it is a problem, but I will say this. As I said, four councilmen have been killed, but it has not stopped the forward progress of Fallujah. The city council still meets. The members that have been killed have been replaced. I think that the Fallujans are stepping up to this challenge, and they refuse to give up. So it is definitely a problem, but it is by no means defeating the citizens of Fallujah.

QQ And just as a quick follow-up, that's four of -- did you say 20 councilmen?

COL. SIMCOCK: We currently have a city council of 20, and then four of those councilmen have been killed in about the last year. Each time, again, they have in fact been replaced. And the city council continues to meet and continues to do the day-to-day business for Fallujah.

MR. WHITMAN: Go ahead.

QQ He's --

MR. WHITMAN: Oh, yeah. (I wasn't paying attention ?). Al.

QQ Colonel, it's Al Pessin from Voice of America. You used the line in your opening statement, something to the effect that "You can do more because you have more." Can you give us some details on that? What sorts of additional things are you doing with the extra folks? And how do you think that increase in numbers can translate into other parts of Anbar and also into Baghdad, where the surge has gone up?

COL. SIMCOCK: Right. Let me walk you through exactly how I'm using this, because it's kind of a repetitive tactic that I'm using in different areas of my area of operation.

One of the things that I wanted to break here was what I call a Whack-a-Mole-type of activity, where we were constantly going to places where there were problems dealing with it, but because we didn't have the force structure that I have, we'd have to move on somewhere else. The people that we're fighting would fall in behind us because we didn't have a permanent presence there to prevent them from doing that.

What we're able to do now, because I have a greater force structure, is to go into a particular area, go in with a large force, establish the security that needs to be at that particular place, and then that sets the conditions where the Iraqi security forces, be they Iraqi army, Iraqi police or the provisional security forces can then come in behind us and we transition over to them. So it breaks that cycle of a Whack-a-Mole that I mentioned, where we don't have to turn around and come back to that piece of ground again.

It's been very successful. We've used that cycle, if you will, four different times, and it has been very, very successful for us. But by the increased amount of forces that I have combined with the Iraqi security forces, it has worked very, very well for us.

To take that on to outside AO Raleigh, I really couldn't comment on that. It's working extremely well for us here. And that's not to say it wouldn't work somewhere else, but I really can't comment outside AO Raleigh.

MR. WHITMAN: Ken.

QQ (Off mike.) Colonel, it's Ken Fireman from Bloomberg News. Some commanders in western Iraq have reported an increase in the tempo of enemy activity since the surge as some insurgents leave Baghdad and go to other areas. Have you experienced this in your AO?

COL. SIMCOCK: To a limited degree. AO Raleigh is kind of the middle, if you will -- we're in between Baghdad and Ramadi. Fallujah is kind of equidistant between the two. There is no doubt that on each of my flanks in Baghdad and Ramadi, coalition forces are having success.

As I think I mentioned earlier, the people that we're fighting will always go the way of least resistance. They may perceive that AO Raleigh is that weak spot, and they may be coming here. I will tell you that I welcome them here, for a couple of reasons that I've mentioned to you already. We have a very capable force, not only the coalition force, but our Iraqi brethren. And if they see AO Raleigh as a weak spot and a way that's the path of least resistance, they're in for a very, very unpleasant surprise. I'm very confident in our

abilities. I'm very, very confident in the growing abilities of the Iraqis. And as far as an upbeat in -- or an uptake in activities, I'm not really seeing it. It's kind of remaining the same.

QQ Thank you.

MR. WHITMAN: Tom?

QQ Colonel, I wonder if we can get back to the money issue in Anbar with the central government. You said there seems to be a problem getting the money from Baghdad. Could you expand on that a little bit? How much money are we talking about? How much more does Anbar need? And for what particular projects? What do you need this money to really get going there?

COL. SIMCOCK: I don't want to talk on things that really I don't have a lot of experience with. But I can just tell you this, that the projects that we have working in AO Raleigh now are being completed; we have adequate financial support for them. What I'm not getting the support from is things that are coming in outside of something that I have visibility on. That would be something that's going through the Iraqi system, through the minister of Interior that I really don't have visibility on, that I really don't feel I could comment on that.

QQ Can you give us a sense of what it is? Is it creating police stations, is it funding police? What is it? And clearly, reconstruction is a big part of this, isn't it? We've all been told it's not a military solution, it's a political solution, and the whole point of this surge is to send troops in and then start rebuilding. One would think it would be important to know exactly how much money is not heading there and what projects, you know, have to be funded.

COL. SIMCOCK: No, I understand your question. I just don't want to talk about something that I don't have the knowledge to talk about. Reconstruction, without a doubt, is of critical importance to what we're doing, and the increase in military here is supporting that reconstruction. And I am seeing on a day-to-day basis here in Fallujah reconstruction that's going on; as I mentioned, the sewer project, the building of hospitals and clinics. There's no doubt that the Iraqi police are increasing. They are getting paid. They are receiving equipment. What I can't really comment on is from the Iraqi side and the type of support, be it financial or other, through the minister of Interior.

MR. WHITMAN: Jeff?

QQ Colonel, Jeff Schogol again. Just a quick follow-up question. The four councilmen killed, that represents, I think, about 20 percent of city council. How does council keep going after taking a hit like that? And who is behind these killings?

COL. SIMCOCK: How they keep going is they meet the very next week and they elect a replacement and the meeting continues just like that.

Who's doing it? The enemy that we face here, the terrorists, again. They fear the city government of Fallujah. They know that the only way that they can combat it is through their murder and intimidation tactics, and I'm very, very proud of the elected mayor and his city councilmen for not giving into that tactic. I think they're very brave to come back and face that threat, elect a replacement and continue the business of the city of Fallujah.

MR. WHITMAN: David.

QQ David Morgan from Reuters. Who is the enemy that you face? Is it -- are they insurgents or are they al Qaeda?

COL. SIMCOCK: I'm facing three groups of enemy here in AO Raleigh. The largest group, easily 75

percent, if not more, is al Qaeda. The second group that I face, maybe 10-15 percent, is a criminal element. The third group that I'm facing is a nationalistic group. I'm sure you're familiar with the 1920's organization. Those are the three main elements, but by far, my biggest enemy group is in fact al Qaeda.

QQ Follow up, do you believe that one of these groups is responsible for all of these -- for these four assassinations? And if so, which one?

COL. SIMCOCK: I couldn't tell for sure. By doing what they're doing, it leads me to believe, again, that it's al Qaeda. I think an organized government here that represents the people of Fallujah poses the greatest threat to al Qaeda. The people of Fallujah and I think Iraqis in general, they want to move forward. The terrorists that we're fighting are just the opposite. They're trying to move backwards. They want to go back to the 7th century, and the people of Iraq -- at least what I'm seeing in AO Raleigh on a day-to-day basis -- they don't want that; they want to move forward.

So I think that the people doing this by and large is that largest group of the enemy that I face, al Qaeda.

MR. WHITMAN: Courtney.

QQ Hi, Colonel. This is Courtney Kube from NBC News. You mentioned that you've been able to do more with the Marines that you have there, the more than 6,000 Marines. Could you use even more Marines in your area? Would that help even more to break this whack- a-mole, as you call the cycle?

And then, also, could you give us an idea of the number -- the level of violence that you've been seeing lately, specifically numbers of attacks? Have they gone down over the past few weeks, and can you back it up with some numbers, please?

COL. SIMCOCK: I think if you ask any commander if he wants more troops, I think then he's going to ask himself two questions. Can I support them logistically, and do I have the battle space to employ them? Answer both those questions with yes, and you'll always take more troops.

Do I need more to accomplish my mission? No. I have more than sufficient to do what I need with the mission that I've been given to prevent accelerants from going into Baghdad and to conduct counterinsurgency operations.

As far as an increase in operations, again, it's almost stayed a constant level. I don't have numbers in front of me to give you, but in the five months that we've been here, there have been periodic drops and then it'll pick up again. But on average, it's stayed almost the status quo.

MR. WHITMAN: Go ahead, Ken.

QQ Ken Fireman again, Colonel. Of the al Qaeda that you're facing in your area, can you say what percentage homegrown as it were are Iraqis and what percentage are foreign?

COL. SIMCOCK: I can't give you exact percentages. I can tell you that we have seen outside influences coming into AO Raleigh. Some of them, as you put it, are homegrown that we're facing here. It's a combination thereof. Probably the largest group is al Qaeda that come from somewhere in-country, but like I say, it's across the board. We see them from a lot of outside countries that are coming here to fight.

QQ Has that changed? Well, you've only been there five months, but from what you know from your predecessors, has that changed? Has the mix become more heavily Iraqi as opposed to foreign?

COL. SIMCOCK: Well, we're seeing a trend in that way. We're seeing fewer and fewer outside country

coming in here. So I would say, yeah, the trend is to see less.

QQ Thank you.

MR. WHITMAN: AI.

QQ Colonel, it's AI Pessin again. You mentioned your two main missions, one being a counterinsurgency. How much of the counterinsurgency mission is security and how much of it is relationship-building, facilitating governance, economic development, et cetera?

COL. SIMCOCK: Yeah, they go hand in hand. I mean, it's almost 50-50. You know, the question is, which came first, the chicken or the egg? I've got to have security in order to go talk to people, because if they don't feel safe, they won't talk to me. And when I talk to them, they tell me things about the environment that I'm in that I don't know, so that builds on the security piece. And it quickly snowballs. They do go hand-in-hand. Like I say, one is not more important than the other. But to me, you know, security is obviously an important piece of it. It probably comes first, and then that quickly leads to the engagement piece, and they start building on one another.

QQ Colonel, it's Luis Martinez with ABC News. Two weeks ago there was a Pentagon study about the mental health assessment of the troops in Iraq. And it pointed out that there were some shortcomings in terms of the battlefield ethics. I think it noted that Marines were less likely to turn in their colleagues if they intimidated or mistreated the local Iraqis. Have you instituted anything to counter that? Or what is your opinion of them?

COL. SIMCOCK: You know, with that question, first off I say that, you know, I have not seen that within AO Raleigh. And I think the best thing that our Marines receive prior to coming over here is the training that they go through. I think all of our Marines fully understand the law of armed conflict. They receive training on that, I mean, from the moment they enter the Marine Corps, or in the Army's case, when they enter the Army. That is something they're well-versed on, they understand it very well, and it hasn't been a problem that I've seen over here in AO Raleigh at all.

MR. WHITMAN: Well, Colonel, we've just about come to the end of our time and we want to give you the last minute or two if you have any closing comments or perhaps anything we didn't raise here that you think is important for us to know.

COL. SIMCOCK: Well, thanks again, Mr. Whitman. And thank you all for your time.

I think it's critically important that you get the opportunity to hear from the service members that are over here in Iraq.

One of my concerns is the importance of what we're doing over here is not getting back to the American public. In that vein, I think this is very, very valuable. But I encourage you and invite you all to come over here to AO Raleigh and spend some time over here for yourselves and see exactly what I'm talking about. It's easy to talk about, and maybe I don't portray exactly a lot of the successes that we're having over here, but if you get the opportunity, I encourage you to come over. I invite you so that you can see for yourselves how well the soldiers, sailors and Marines are doing over here and accomplishing a very, very difficult mission but a mission that's incredibly important to our nation.

Thanks.

MR. WHITMAN: Thank you again, Colonel, for spending some time with us this morning, and we hope before your tour is up, we'll have the opportunity to do it again.

COL. SIMCOCK: I look forward to it.

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

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

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

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