



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

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Presenter: Commander, 89th Military Police Brigade, Col. Michael Galloucis January 26, 2007 9:00 AM EST

DoD News Briefing with Col. Galloucis from Iraq

(Note: Colonel Galloucis appears via digital video imagery distribution system from Iraq.)

BRYAN WHITMAN (deputy assistant secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Good morning, and welcome. I think many of you will recognize the individual that's on our screen this morning. This is Colonel Mike Galloucis, who's had several tours in the Pentagon and had a, at times, close working relationship with the press corps here also.

But Colonel Galloucis is now the commander of the 89th Military Police Brigade in Iraq, and he's speaking to us today from Baghdad. And as is our normal format, he'll open it up, give you an overview of what his unit's been doing, and then we'll get into some questions.

So, Mike, welcome back to the briefing room, even if you're all the way over in Baghdad.

COL. GALLOUCIS: Thank you for that introduction, Mr. Whitman. I appreciate it. And thank you for your continued service to the Department of Defense and our nation.

Good morning to all of you there, from Baghdad. I truly appreciate this opportunity to speak with you. I've worked with many of you over the years, from inside the building, as Bryan indicated, and of course I look forward to our dialogue today.

I do have a couple of prepared comments, and then I'll be happy to field your questions.

Before getting to my prepared remarks, I thought I'd share a vignette with you, one that some of you might find amusing. Bright and early this morning, I was huffing and puffing on an elliptical machine and listening to an iPod. My two teenaged kids download songs for me on a routine basis, and of course you never know what type of music you'll get when they send it to you. But one thing is for certain. It's not going to be Frank Sinatra or the Beatles.

Anyway, as I worked out and thought about meeting with you later today, a song came on by the artist Meat Loaf, and the name of the song was "Out of the Frying Pan (and into the Fire)." I'm not sure if any of you have heard that song, but in addition to being a great song, I thought to myself: How appropriate that I'm hearing that song today, as I get ready to face the Pentagon press corps.

Let me start by saying there are obviously many changes afoot, but key to our success here is assisting the Iraqi government to secure the population. The Iraqis are a proud people, and they have proven to be resilient throughout their rich history. They are tired of the violence and bloodshed, and want to move their country forward.

Our fundamental role here is to support the Iraqi security forces as the Iraqi government moves forward toward securing the populace.

Up front, I believe it's important for me to make a few distinctions.

First, the 89th MP Brigade is only involved in the training of the Iraqi Police Service, or IP. This formation is responsible for local law enforcement. We are not involved in training the Iraqi national police, which, as you know, has many other missions and are trained by other coalition forces.

The second distinction I want to make is that in addition to the 89th Military Police Brigade, another important command which has a prominent role in training and equipping parts of the Iraqi police is the Civilian Police Assistance Training Team, or CPATT, which is commanded by a U.S. Army major general. CPATT is responsible for training Iraqi police in the institutional setting, such as the Baghdad Police College, the Jordanian Police Training Center in Amman, Jordan, and another large police training academy in Numaniyah, which is south of Baghdad. We work very closely with CPATT all the time, and the training that we do at the local station level builds upon their efforts.

My role as the commander of the 89th Military Police Brigade is to exercise command and control, or C2, over several units, both Army, and we also have Air Force units in our formation. Our mission is to assist the Iraqi police at many different levels as they develop organizations, procedures and a wide variety of skills that will enable them to serve and protect the people of Iraq, enforce a common rule of law, and, working side by side with Iraqi army and Iraqi national police units, maintain order in what is now a dynamic and dangerous environment.

The Iraqi officials I work with on a daily basis, primarily within the Iraqi police service and the Ministry of Interior, are dedicated to the cause of building their country and protecting its citizens. On a daily basis throughout this country, Iraqi police are exhibiting tremendous acts of bravery and are working hard to change long-standing perceptions, and to earn the trust, confidence and respect of their fellow citizens. By enhancing the capabilities of the Iraqi police, we are helping set the conditions for more Iraqi self-reliance.

Likewise, my soldiers and airmen are performing superbly and courageously in their roles as instructors, coaches and mentors to the senior Iraqi police that they work with, and all the Iraqi police they work with. Their dedication to our mission today is as strong as it's ever been. We are not just teaching the Iraqi police specific tasks such as how to fire a weapon, clear a building, administer first aid, make an arrest, maintain their equipment, et cetera, we're also teaching the Iraqi police at many levels, merely by our presence and interaction with them, but also by discussing these concepts with them about responsibilities that come with freedom and democracy; about things like the importance of free speech, the value of diversity, the sanctity of human life; the notion of tolerance, restraint and forgiveness; the true meaning of accountability and justice; and the enduring benefit to society of treating all people with dignity and respect; that it is possible for people with different backgrounds and beliefs to live together in peace; and that nothing good ever comes out of hatred and murder -- to name a few of the things we are trying to teach them.

I can assure you and the American people, as my soldiers and airmen traverse the countryside and the streets of major cities such as Baghdad, they fully understand and appreciate how important our mission is to the success of this new democracy. We also know ultimate success here will come not only through military means, and that our diplomatic and economic efforts as a nation and as part of a larger coalition will be equally if not more important over the long haul.

It is important for the American people to know their soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines are doing a superb job here in Iraq every day. (audio break) -- because I have the privilege of commanding thousands of American sons and daughters. They make me proud every day. Their tasks are different but no less difficult than our forefathers who fought in more conventional wars throughout the history of our nation. These men and women are courageous, dedicated, selfless, and they truly are making a difference here in Iraq.

If the American people saw what our servicemen and women were doing here every day, they would swell with pride, as I do. I'm witnessing the next "greatest generation" every day here in Iraq. As a forwardly deployed brigade commander, I am confident the sacrifices my soldiers and airmen are making here in Iraq are not only noticeably improving the Iraqi police, but are also helping make Iraq safer and ultimately will benefit the American people in ways that may not be evident today.

I will close by saying we appreciate the continued support of the American people and also underscore how important that support is as we perform our missions here in Iraq.

And I also want to thank and recognize the families of all the U.S. servicemen and women who are deployed to Iraq and elsewhere throughout the world for the sacrifices they endure every day.

And with that, I will gladly field your questions.

MR. WHITMAN: Thank you, Mike.

We'll go ahead and get started here, and we'll start with Pam.

Q Great. Colonel, this is Pam Hess with United Press International. Could you talk to us about the IPs that you deal with, especially the ones in Baghdad? What are they reporting to you are the conditions on the street? Obviously, the Baghdad Security Plan is not working, and I suspect they bear much of the brunt of that. Are they being intimidated? And what would make them stand and fight? Are they standing and fighting or do they not have the equipment or are they simply overwhelmed with numbers? It seems every day we hear about, you know, a hundred more people found dead in Baghdad, and you've got to wonder where the police are.

COL. GALLOUCIS: Wow. That's many facets of your question. Let me try to take the key thing, I think, that you're trying to get at.

The Iraqi police are dispersed throughout the country of Iraq, and, of course, they're dispersed throughout the city of Baghdad. You used the term "stand and fight"; that probably is an oversimplification of the dynamic here in Baghdad and as well throughout the country. But Iraqi police are not just merely staying in their stations and waiting for all the chaos to end; they are out in the streets every day in mounted and dismounted operations working side by side, quite frankly, with many of my soldiers as well as with other coalition forces and alongside of Iraqi army units and Iraqi national police units. There have been a whole bunch of Iraqi policemen die over the last year. I can assure you, they are, to use your terminology, "standing and fighting."

They're out there every day, trying to do the best they can.

I would personally like to see them have a little bit more in the way of hardened vehicles. They are still driving around in relatively soft-skinned vehicles, by our standards. Some of that is mitigated by the hardened vehicles that the Iraqi army and Iraqi National Police have. But I personally, as someone who works closely with the Iraqi police, would like to see them have a little bit more in the way of hardened vehicles.

But they are making tremendous strides over here and are out there every day, putting it all on the line, to help turn the tide and stem the flow of violence that has been so prevalent here.

Q Got it. I understand that they're trying hard. But it's not working, and I'm wondering why it's not working. Are they simply overwhelmed with numbers of bad guys? Is it an equipment problem? Is it something else that we don't know about? Because it's clearly not working, and you have an excellent view at the very lowest level as to what the problems are.

COL. GALLOUCIS: Well, I think you have to realize -- and everyone has to realize -- that this is a work in progress. This is taking time. I would not use your assessment. You're saying something is not working. You're making that assessment from where you are situated, and I can understand how you come to those conclusions.

But I would tell you that things here take time to work. You have to realize, everyone has to realize this country had over 30 years under a brutal dictator, and everything in the country basically was very centrally controlled. And so now that's obviously not what's taking place, and it's a very dangerous, very complex dynamic environment here.

So there is open violence in the streets. There's no question about it. But we see here gradual movement, gradual progress, and it's just going to take time. And it's not just on the shoulders of the Iraqi police. There is a lot of people that are involved in helping stem the violence that we see here. To say that it would only be on the shoulders of the Iraqi police would be unfair to them and a misrepresentation of really what's going on in this country.

There are a lot of people in this country that have responsibilities for trying to stop the violence that we see. The Iraqi police are one part of that -- (audio break) -- as they can, with our assistance, and working side by side by their countrymen in the other units that I mentioned to try to turn the tide of violence. It's going to take time.

Q Colonel, this is Dave Wood from the Baltimore Sun. Could you talk a little bit about what we've heard here is one of the most significant problems for the police, which is infiltration by or control by the sectarian militias, in particular, the Interior Ministry -- could you talk a little bit about what the impact of those -- of the sectarian forces are on the police department out on the street?

COL. GALLOUCIS: Sure, David. That's a good question.

Militias are very prevalent here throughout Iraq. There's no question about that. And they are -- have presence within all of the Iraqi security forces: the army, the national police, as well as the police. No one can really put a real firm handle on coming up with what percentage the militias are involved with any of those elements, to include the Iraqi police. But I would tell you that in my view, there is a significant presence of militia within the Iraqi police structure, and they do influence the Iraqi police and those other units in different ways.

One of the things that's unique about this culture, as compared to a Western culture of -- the criminal justice system, in our system back in the States and in other Western cultures, fundamentally, you have only about four or five players in the whole system. You have the police, you have the judges and courts, you have the prisons, and of course you have lawyers in that process. Well, here you have all of those same players, but you also have the local religious and tribal leaders, and they have a big influence on what happens throughout the Iraqi culture, so some of that does carry over into the police force.

And what I see, and what my soldiers see, at different levels is probably a relatively small percent of the police are actually actively engaged in supporting and carrying out militia activities, and a larger percentage is somehow tied into the militias in that they are enabling that behavior to occur and are just not actively supporting it. So in other words, they are, for lack of a better description, maybe looking the other way to some of the problematic behavior that's occurring. It's out there.

But now let me just say this: The prime minister here -- recently, as recently as just a few days ago -- really came up with some very strong words and policies as it pertains -- (audio break). I think everyone here that's been here for some time recognizes that that was absolutely essential to helping turn the tide of events here in Iraq. So I really think now that the government of Iraq has come out pretty strong in defining what militias are supposed to do, what they can do, and at what point do they cross over into illegal behavior -- I really think that's going to help a lot in, you know, getting the militias back in what should be their proper place in this society.

I don't think it's reasonable for anyone to think that militias will ever go away, but the key thing is, is that they conform to the norms and the values and the rule of law within the society, and as long as they can do that, then they won't be as destructive as they have been in the past.

MR. WHITMAN: Tom. Go ahead.

Q Hey, colonel, Tom Bowman with NPR. I know you work with the local police, but there was a plan to remove corrupt leaders of the national police and those with ties to sectarian militias and also retrain the rank and file police members. It was something called Quick Look. Is that still ongoing or has that been completed? And do you know what the results were of that?

COL. GALLOUCIS: Okay. If you recall -- I will try to address that in a roundabout way, but remember my opening remarks, where I talked about the command that I have the fortunate privilege of commanding does not get involved with the national police. So really what you're talking about pertains more to the national police.

But let me just take your question by saying this to you. A, that process is still ongoing. And I will tell you that there's a very comprehensive effort both with the national police and the Iraqi police for coalition forces working with our Iraqi counterparts to try to identify corrupt leaders. And where those leaders are identified as corrupt and not living up to what the government of Iraq expects, I can tell you that those individuals are removed from positions of leadership.

I have seen that occur in the Iraqi National Police at a very senior level, and with the people that I work with within the Iraqi police, I can also tell you that it has occurred. I work and have dialogue with the minister of Interior here, Ministry of Interior. The minister is a gentleman by the name of Bulani. And Minister Bulani is very committed to getting rid of leaders within the Iraqi police structure who are corrupt or who are promoting a sectarian agenda. And several of those have been put out of jobs, basically.

There is a growing effort here for Iraq police accountability and a really new -- an Iraqi police reform program that involves a whole bunch of things, but to include a more robust Internal Affairs Directorate in essence to police the police.

So yes, the program you mentioned are [sic] ongoing; and yes, the coalition forces now are seeing considerable progress on the part of the Iraqis in holding senior leaders accountable for their actions throughout all of the Iraqi security force formations: Iraqi army, Iraqi national police, and the Iraqi police.

MR. WHITMAN: Jeff.

Q Colonel, Jeff Schogol with Stars & Stripes. The most recent progress report on Iraq that was given to Congress said that in some cases, death squads were able to carry out their activities with the complicity of police in Baghdad. Can you talk how often this happens now in Baghdad?

COL. GALLOUCIS: Well, I don't think it's something that anyone can comment specifically on how often it happens because in most cases these horrific acts of murder that we find, in essence what you do is you find the

body, and very rarely do you find the act, you know, in progress. So the bodies are -- there's quite a few of them, as you guys know, and the evidence is not such that you can say who specifically perpetrated the acts. I mean, these are acts that people are not leaving their signature, per se. And there has not been much luck in actually, you know, finding the people who are carrying out the acts. So I don't think the question is one that can lead to a logical answer.

And as far as the complicity of any members of the Iraqi security forces in that, you have to also think about this from the other perspective; that the insurgents and the other elements that are out there that are trying to undermine the existing government clearly are very adept at using different tactics, techniques and procedures to portray certain things. And what better way to have -- (audio break) -- murderers wear different types of uniforms so that if anyone did see them, they would presume that the people wearing the uniforms were in fact, you know, the actual people from those formations.

One of the things most of us learn, that have been over here for some amount of time, is very rarely what you see is what it really is. I guess where I'm going with that is many things that you initially think might be something, turns out to be something completely different.

So, have there been Iraqi policemen and others from the Iraqi security forces involved in acts of sectarian violence and extrajudicial killings? I think the answer to that probably unequivocally is yes.

But again, keep in mind that a lot of people that are carrying out those acts are not part of those formations, and also keep in mind that the government of Iraq is very committed to weeding out those types of people from their ranks in a very aggressive, ongoing action that's taking place as we speak.

MR. WHITMAN: We have a time for a couple more. Let's go to Kathleen and then Andrew.

Q Colonel, this is Kathleen Koch with CNN. I'm wondering right now in your role in training Iraqi police, what is it at this point in time that keeps you up at night? What is the greatest challenge that you face in bringing the Iraqi police where they need to be so that they can begin to restore or maintain order in cities like Baghdad and then throughout the country?

COL. GALLOUCIS: Well, there is a lot of things that people think about over here on a daily basis.

The thing that we're trying to work here I think that will really help the overall posture of this country is to get the three elements of the Iraqi security forces to work more closely together. If you look historically here, there have been strong cultural -- organizational cultural divides -- (audio break) -- the Iraqi national police and the Iraqi army. That's not unlike a lot of things you see in the States, where sometimes the local officials do not get along with the state-level officials who sometimes have problems getting along with the federal officials. So it's not to be considered something out of the ordinary. But it is occurring, and so what we're trying to do is try to get those three elements to work more closely together.

I'm convinced personally that if those three elements work together as a team in support of the government of Iraq's overarching objectives that they will be very successful in weeding out the insurgents and isolating the terrorists and really restoring the security in this country. But that right now is a challenge that the coalition, as we carry out operations and as we move to different types of operations where the three of those groups are going to be working closely together -- that is a challenge that we are all contending with.

MR. WHITMAN: Andrew, let's finish up with you.

Q Colonel, it's Andrew Gray from Reuters here. I just wondered how much of your work consists of working with the Iraqi police on treatment of detainees, people that they arrest.

And what are your challenges in that regard? Have you had any problems with the way that Iraqi police treat the detainees?

COL. GALLOUCIS: I think I heard your question. The detainee piece, every -- just about every Iraqi police station, just like about every American police station has some type of holding facility or what we would traditionally call a jail. My soldiers and air men go into the Iraqi police stations always as part of a routine process. Every time they go in a police station they check the jails, and they see what is going on in there, the numbers of people that are there. We look for evidence of any type of mistreatment of the people that are behind bars. Oftentimes our medical personnel that are traveling with our formations administer some type of first aid to the detainees.

But obviously, this is an area that the Iraqi police with our oversight have made considerable progress in. They know that the coalition forces at every level, from private all the way up to four-star general, are not going to tolerate any abuse of detainees. And they've gotten that message loud and clear over the last several years here.

So we're able to record, and any time we see anything that we have any suspicions at all, our teams carry digital cameras with them. We photograph the incident, we catalog it, and we turn it into the appropriate authorities. So the Iraqis are really getting a lot more on the ball with this and taking this more seriously. So I think -- now, the other thing I would tell you is that the larger challenge of detainees in general is not something that my command has to contend with. There's another organization here in Iraq whose primary mission is to hand over detainee mission, and I would rather defer to that commander to make those assessments.

But my guys get involved in that at the station level, and any time they see anything that's problematic, they record it and turn that information in and appropriate action is taken.

Q Well, I mean, is it still a problem? How widespread -- how often do they come across incidents like that?

COL. GALLOUCIS: I don't -- at the level that we travel, I will tell you we interact at police stations all throughout Iraq basically, and based on the percentage of how many people are actually behind bars and how many of them are abused, I would say it represents at this point in history a very small percentage. The challenge here sometimes is not the traditional abuse that people might equate to this part of the world. Now at times the challenge becomes perhaps at times overcrowding or something of that nature versus physical abuse.

MR. WHITMAN: Well, we have reached the end of our time. Actually, we've gone past our allotted time.

And we appreciate you taking the time to speak to us this morning.

And before we bring it to a close, let me just turn it back to you in case you had any closing comments that you'd like to make.

COL. GALLOUCIS: Thank you, Mr. Whitman, for that opportunity. I would just close by saying this is probably the most complex war our nation has been involved in. And most Americans, and a lot of Westerners, like their wars simple and over fast, and that's not, clearly, what is happening here. You all have to remember that attempting to inculcate democratic principles in a country like Iraq is not an easy enterprise or one that you can really put a specific timeline on. As we say in the Army, you must train to standard not to time. And everything here has to be conditions-based.

I'm truly confident that the sacrifices and efforts that our soldiers and airmen, sailors and Marines, and also our civilians that are serving over here -- that's going to eventually produce long-term benefits, and those benefits will not only benefit the people of Iraq, they will benefit the people throughout the Middle East, and

ultimately they will benefit the United States of America.

MR. WHITMAN: Well, thank you very much, Colonel Galloucis. We do appreciate your time. We know that you have a substantial amount of time left on your tour there, and so we hope that in another couple of months we might be able to have you back and convince you that this wasn't too bad and you can do it again.

COL. GALLOUCIS: I'll be glad to do it, Mr. Whitman.

MR. WHITMAN: (Off mike) -- to get back to the frying pan, I guess.

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