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Presenter: Chief of Staff Multinational Corps-Iraq Brig. Gen. Joseph Anderson March 02, 2007 9:00 AM EST

DoD News Briefing with Brig. Gen. Anderson from Iraq

(Note: General Anderson appears via video teleconference from Iraq.)

COL. GARY KECK (director of the Press Office, Department of Defense): Good morning, everyone. This is the Pentagon press briefing room, as you're all aware, and I'm glad to have you here. And as you know, I'm Colonel Gary Keck, the director of the Press Office, and it's my privilege today to moderate this press briefing.

And we have with us from Iraq today Brigadier General Joseph Anderson, the chief of staff for Multinational Corps-Iraq. General Anderson arrived in Iraq with the 3rd U.S. Corps in November of last year, and he has served as the corps chief of staff since August of 2006.

This is General Anderson's second tour in Iraq. His first was as the commander of the 2nd Brigade, 502nd Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, from July 2002 to July 2004. His unit led the division's main effort in areas such as Karbala, Baghdad and Mosul. So he brings a wealth of experience and perspective to our discussion this morning.

The general's coming to us from Camp Liberty in Baghdad. And with that, sir, I'm going to turn it over to you for opening comments.

GEN. ANDERSON: Thanks, Gary.

Good morning to all of you, and thanks for coming out this morning. I have a few prepared comments. Then I'll gladly take your questions.

Today we are firmly focused on Operation Fard al-Qanun, which translated means "enforcing the law." The plan was devised by the government of Iraq and is being led in Baghdad by Lieutenant General Abboud.

Central to the success of the plan is that Iraqi security forces, including the national and local police, and the Iraqi army, are working in concert with the coalition forces in the 10 security districts.

Our forces, working together, are providing a 24-hour presence within the city. We have established several joint security stations and combat outposts, with more being built, in order to operate among the

populace.

Our increased presence continually within the city, combined with the additional coalition and Iraqi forces, has as its primary purpose the security of Iraqi citizens. Protecting the populace is necessary to develop the economic and political processes to achieve stability.

In past efforts, we had been able to clear areas but were not able to hold the areas and secure them over time. We must demonstrate our ability to maintain the security in Baghdad over a long period of time.

As you know, we are putting additional coalition troops into Baghdad over the next few months. To date, we have the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division and the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division moved into the area of operations. We expect to complete the buildup by the end of May. There are also four more battalions of Iraqi army soldiers that have moved or will move into Baghdad recently -- move into Baghdad.

Recently, the Iraqi air force airlifted Iraqi soldiers from northern Iraq to Baghdad. This effort demonstrates an increasing degree of coordination and planning by the Iraqi security forces.

We are fully aware that it will take time for this plan to work. While we cannot know precisely how long, it is fair to say that it will be months, certainly not weeks. There will also be those extremists from Shi'a and Sunni sources alike who will seek to ensure this plan fails. They will continue to use car bombs, suicide bombs and other spectacular means to instill terror and disrupt the progress of the government of Iraq.

Though early in the process, there are some indications that we are affecting the planning and operations of the enemy. You have undoubtedly seen the pictures of numerous large caches of weapons, improvised explosive device material, munitions and materials used in making various other explosives. In fact, as recently as yesterday near Yusufiya, we found 14 caches containing hundreds of mortar rounds of varying sizes, rocket propelled grenades, rocket launchers, grenades, detonation cord, artillery rounds, tank rounds, fuses, IED-making material, sniper rifles, Katyusha rockets and numerous other items. This combined with several other recent cache finds are indicators that we have put increased presence in the area of operations, and the local populace is willing to cooperate with us in stopping the violence in Iraq.

Again, we are still early in the operation, and we expect there will be significant efforts by the enemy to alter its tactics to meet this challenge. He will try every means at his disposal to cause death and destruction, and we know hard days certainly lie ahead.

With that, I'll gladly take your questions.

COL. KECK: Thank you, sir. We appreciate it.

I will remind you all that General Anderson cannot see you, so please identify yourself and your news organization so he knows who he's talking to.

Let's begin with Pauline.

Q Pauline Jelinek with the Associated Press. Sir, of these numerous caches of weapons, could you tell us a little bit about the origins? You know, we've been told about things coming in from Iran, but could you talk about -- are these new shipments of weapons into Iraq? Are these things -- massive caches left over from previous days of Saddam Hussein's regime? Anything that you know along those lines.

GEN. ANDERSON: I sure can. I think you find them of both types. There's clearly still remnants of war from Iraq, Saddam days, all over this country -- munitions, weapons and the like. The difference is now we're

clearly finding the same types of munitions and weaponry that is clearly marked from Iran. And the other component of that is there are components of IEDs, other bomb-making material that clearly come into Iraq, are put together here to form these explosive devices to cause destruction to the coalition and the Iraqi security forces.

So it's really a combination of both. And I don't think anything is fabricated here in Iraq, I think it's either shipped in or it's from the previous regime.

Q Follow-up to that. How much of it is left over, and how much of it is new? And places -- could you please tell us -- other than Iran that are sources.

GEN. ANDERSON: The main things we're finding right now are the stuff marked from Iran. There's also -- there's still stuff you'll find here from Desert Storm/Desert Shield days. You'll still find stuff that was shipped and was used in Kuwait -- so stuff that's been around 10, 15 or more years that you'll still find in boxes, containers, warehouses, bunkers, et cetera. But primarily, that is still the primary means of where all this stuff comes from. There are indications of Iran. But we haven't found anything else marked anything else from those two places, either Kuwait, Iran or here in Iraq itself.

Q (Off mike) -- the bulk of it is old or newly shipped?

GEN. ANDERSON: That one you have to say again. I couldn't hear that one.

Q I still didn't understand. The bulk of this weaponry is old from years ago, or newly coming in?

GEN. ANDERSON: The bulk is from years ago. The bulk of this stuff -- a lot of this stuff is very old.

Q Hi, General. It's Anna Mulrine with U.S. News and World Report. Good to see you.

I just wanted to ask about possible Sadr City operations that we're hearing about. How soon could those start? And, you know, how important is it that we get into Sadr City, and how many troops would that involve?

GEN. ANDERSON: Sadr City right now falls into the 2nd Brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division's area. A couple of things are going on. One is the national police are already in there with the -- (audio break) -- that's been ongoing.

The good news is the brigade commander of 2nd Brigade, Colonel Farris, is in dialogue with the mayor of Sadr City. The first step is to establish a joint security station, and that work is in progress right now. We think we'll begin building the structure around that sometime this week. That will be the initial footprint, if you will, in Sadr City to begin further operations before increased patrols and those type things occur, all within a month, for sure.

Q Is there some sort of large clearing operation planned?

GEN. ANDERSON: That will all be situational dependent. How much of it has to be -- I mean, each phase of Fard al-Qanun has a clear, control, retain aspect of it. There will be patrols beginning. How much of it has to be a door-to-door cordon and search versus cordon and knock variant will depend on what resistance they meet or don't meet. The good news is, again, to the surprise of all of us, the mayors have been very cooperative and there's good dialogue going on on the future operations and security of Sadr City, which if you'd asked us that a month or two ago, we probably wouldn't have thought that.

Q Sir, Fred Baker with American Forces Press Service. The inability to hold, is that strictly a manpower issue that will be solved by additional troops, or are you changing TTPs in the way you do business?

GEN. ANDERSON: The primary aspect of hold or control is sheer presence. Between the joint security stations and the combat outposts, that gives us presence in the city, which is the real key component of this in how we operate out of those nodes versus coming out of forward operating bases that are in places like here and migrating into the city. It's permanent physical presence and it's the ability -- what you just said, it's more troops, both Iraqi and coalition. That's the key. Iraqi security forces are probably going to total about 20,000, and of course the coalition forces surge, 20 total brigade combat teams in and around Baghdad. That sheer increase in numbers will allow us to maintain a much better, to use your term, hold of Baghdad.

COL. KECK: Sir, you just said 20 brigade combat teams in and around Baghdad. Is that correct?

GEN. ANDERSON: That's correct.

COL. KECK: Currently. Or the goal.

GEN. ANDERSON: Currently, right.

COL. KECK: Sir, that seems a higher number than that was anticipated total in all of Iraq. That's 20 brigade combat teams in and around Baghdad?

GEN. ANDERSON: Well, okay. I see what you mean. It's 20 BCTs total in Iraq. The BCT posture will be still being determined by the conditions around the belt, so excuse me, but there will be five outside, seven inside, so the preponderance. It's the 20 BCT surge for Iraq total, 12 to 14, still to be determined based on when 2nd Brigade, 3rd Division comes in, 4th Brigade, 2nd Stryker shows up, where those finally end up going. But ballpark, 12, 15 in and around the belts of the city.

COL. KECK: Thanks, sir. That helps.

Go ahead, Jim.

Q Jim Mannion from Agence France Presse. I was wondering if you could go through the -- how many Iraqi battalions are in Baghdad now, what their strength is, and also if you could talk about, you know, the levels of violence and the type of violence that you're seeing in the city, how that's changed over the past two weeks.

GEN. ANDERSON: Okay. The total number of Iraqi battalions will be nine, and that is in the city. So I'll try to make that clear so we're not talking out/in. Nine in the city. The MTO&E or the standard table of organization for these Iraqi battalions is 7-5-9 -- 759. The majority of them are coming within the 80 to 90 percentile, which is very good news when they show up from the north, from the south. And that's what will be operating for part of the surge. Then, of course, you have the divisions that were already in the city, the 6th Iraqi Army Division, 9th Iraqi Army Division, and the two National Police Divisions.

So again, that is about a 20,000 total Iraqi security force posture inside Baghdad itself. We'll be approaching 9,000 with additional flow from outside Baghdad here by next week -- the next week to 10 days.

Q The levels of violence.

COL. KECK: Oh, sir, could you address the -- quickly, the levels of violence as you see it at this moment, how would you assess it?

GEN. ANDERSON: Yeah, that's where I was going. The levels of violence have decreased, which is the good news. There is still militia activity against the government of Iraq and the Iraqi security forces. There are still terror, insurgent-type attacks against the coalition. Those numbers have gone down. The primary means is still

EFPs, explosively formed projectiles. The second is kind of a buried -- the IED, improvised explosive device -- the buried variant of that. There are still above-ground IEDs. And there's still direct fire contact, as well as indirect fire by both mortars and rockets. But those numbers are on the decrease.

I think the one thing on the increase that's probably a little bit more a challenge, militia challenge against the government of Iraq and the Iraqi security forces.

Q Good morning, sir. Mike Fabey from Aviation Week and Aerospace Daily.

GEN. ANDERSON: Hello.

Q Could you -- we've been hearing a lot that we've been using technology to kind of keep troops out of harm's way with unmanned systems and things like that. Can you give me a little detail on how it's being used up there right now?

GEN. ANDERSON: I heard part of it. Are you talking how technology helps the soldiers on the ground? Is that what you asked?

Q (Off mike) -- harm's way with unmanned systems and things like that.

GEN. ANDERSON: Like unmanned aerial vehicles, is that what you're talking about?

Q And unmanned ground systems, whatever you have.

GEN. ANDERSON: Okay. Okay, robotics and -- okay, that came in a little broken. I'm sorry.

The robotics piece is tremendously helpful in the clearing of IEDs, roadside improvised explosive devices, the dismantling and disabling of those devices. Robotics are a huge assist. What's also becoming a huge assist is all the airborne sensors that are up there, both from UAVs, unmanned aerial vehicles, and other airframes that provide a constant eye, if you will, on the ground.

And it's the change -- the number one thing is the change detection -- figure out by looking at the ground what makes a piece of ground different or stand out from what it was from a previous pass, or what makes it different from what the normal surroundings are. So they can key on that and say, something has changed in that particular area, and we think we have an IED there. That's probably the number one piece, and also monitoring the flow and activities of watching IEDs being in-placed prior to them going off versus post. So all -- a couple good new story there that's helped us quite a bit here in the last couple months.

Q Good morning, general. Bill McMichael, Military Times papers.

You said earlier you're finding numerous Iranian -- or weapons that have an Iranian origin. Are you still apprehending or encountering Iranian agents or troops or people who are associated with that effort? And can you tell us what you're doing with them?

GEN. ANDERSON: There are Iranian detainees. They are being questioned -- to be determined who they are and who they're associated with. The linkage of what level of government, what organization, is a little bit deeper to get into, but we do have some in various sites here. And we'll keep trying to determine through questioning what their motives are, who they're working for, how they're resourcing, what their ultimate goal is here in Iraq.

Q Can you say how many you have detained at any given time, currently, or say in the last week?

Give us a feel for the scope of how many you have -- you're encountering.

GEN. ANDERSON: I heard most of that. I think the last week none -- nothing -- none detained this past week that I'm aware of.

COL. KECK: And sir, the question was, can you give us an order of magnitude, roughly, of the Iranians that are currently being detained?

GEN. ANDERSON: Okay. I heard that better. Yes, it's still minimal. So it's not a large presence. The question becomes, through other organizations, though, in Iraq, what influence some of these folks may have and what, again, other elements from Iran may have on some of the organizations operating in Iraq. That's the harder piece to figure out.

Q Thank you.

Q General, Gordon Lubold of the Christian Science Monitor. Can you talk a little bit about the Iraqis who have fallen into place there in your area recently? What is their readiness? Are they taking initiative to plan some of the patrols and some of the operations you're doing? What's -- where are they? Just generally characterize where they are.

GEN. ANDERSON: They're -- a fairly monumental feat is the establishment of this Baghdad Operations Command. The key thing in that center is the coalition is partnered with the Iraqi security forces. The Iraqi security forces have the lead to plan and execute. They took control of Baghdad yesterday. They have a brand-new command post in Adnan Palace, which is over in the Green Zone. And General Abboud and his staff now have the lead for planning.

They are -- in terms of battle tracking and reporting and all that dialogue, they have come a long way in the last month as a command organization. And I would tell you both the national police command structure, west side of the river, Karkh; Iraqi army command structure on the east side, Rusafa -- they're very capable, competent, great dialogue, and the ability to plan and coordinate operations with coalition forces gets better and better every day.

Q Can you speak to the other issue which you've heard a lot about, which is Iraqis, due to the culture within their military, that they have to go on leave, and they have time to go back to their families? As you go into this kind of plan, the surge plan in Baghdad, how much of that is a concern of yours for these Iraqi forces?

GEN. ANDERSON: It was a huge concern when we first got here, and that was part of the prime minister's 30K -- 30,000 plus-up plan, which was designed to help compensate for Iraqi soldiers that would go and take the week off per month to go pay their -- give their paychecks to their families.

The good news for all the units in Baghdad: that is not being applied. If you are a rotational unit into Baghdad, you are here -- it's a 90-day rotation. And believe it or not, they've actually extended some units now in Baghdad to increase presence, and that's why some of the Iraqi army strength is growing larger here in the last couple of weeks.

They are not going to rotate a couple of units out as they get to know their battlespace and operate with coalition forces in partnership. And I think you all know the power we have through our transition teams working with the Iraqi security forces, but now more than ever the partnership of coalition forces with the Iraqi security forces as they do these operations is phenomenal, and that's a big difference. And the rotation to go back and do those personal things like pay families is not a factor at this point if they're part of the Fard al-Qanun plan.

Q General, Andrew Gray from Reuters. I think a number of us here visited Mosul in 2003, when your

brigade was in command there, when you were with the 101st Airborne. We were very impressed with the level of security at that time. My question is, do you think you'll ever achieve that same level of security?

GEN. ANDERSON: I had a hard time hearing that one. Hold -- I'm sorry. Can you say it again?

Q Yeah. I was just saying -- let me shorten the question. Do you think you'll be able to achieve the same level of security in Baghdad as you had in Mosul in 2003, when you were in charge of the city there?

GEN. ANDERSON: You're talking Iraqi security forces? Is that what you're talking about?

COL. KECK: Sir, let me -- obviously we're having trouble with hearing on this end. He was asking if you feel that you'll ever reach the level of security in Baghdad that you achieved when you were the commander in Mosul.

GEN. ANDERSON: Okay, I'm sorry. I couldn't hear that one.

We're not there yet. I think in the last couple of weeks -- and there's a couple of factors here that are also contributing to increased security, which is the gated communities, the cordoned-off marketplaces -- there's a lot more secure pieces of Baghdad. But what you're referring to in northern Iraq in the old days is -- the troop ratio that we now have from the coalition and the Iraqi security forces in Baghdad is significant. So the level of security gets better, and we do rotate some of the Iraqi security forces through Besmaya Training Complex, which is southwest, I'm sorry, southeast of here, to get them prepared to come in. The quality, their equipment, manning, training levels are much better. We are getting there. I wouldn't say it's quite where it was summer '03 in terms of up north, but it's getting there.

Q General, we've been hearing a lot, particularly last week, about the downing of helicopters within Iraq, and I'm just curious, you know, how big a concern is that for you guys? Are there measures in particular that you're taking these days to prevent that?

GEN. ANDERSON: Yes. You know, we've focused a lot on that. We've had a few incidents here in the past month, as you know. The one this week still appears to be mechanical. It's the 58. And we believe -- well, it's still under investigation. That's still what we think it is.

But to the source of your question, we are -- obviously how we fly, how much day, how much night, what type formations, what altitude, what speeds -- a whole combination of things -- how we vary things up, just like we do on the ground -- we are constantly aware of what the enemy can do and how we have to adjust accordingly. But I'll still tell you that, based on the percentage of hours flown here and how many aircraft we have in the air, it's still an extremely efficient, extremely safe and extremely effective asset here in theater. We just have to, again, make sure that we're always assessing how we fly and what we do with them to make sure we minimize enemy opportunity to shoot at them.

Q Do you have a sense that these are now being targeted in particular by --

GEN. ANDERSON: I'm sorry, Gary. You got to help me with that one.

COL. KECK: (Off mike) -- ask if you feel like they're specifically targeting aircraft for any particular reason, the insurgent groups?

GEN. ANDERSON: Oh, yeah. I mean, the reason they're targeting them is because it's big bang for the buck. It's a definite headline-grabber. One helicopter goes down, that's -- obviously there's always multiple soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines inside of those things, so it's obviously a high casualty rate and of course a very expensive piece of equipment.

So they get a big headline grabber by shooting down -- trying to knock down aircraft. That's why.

COL. KECK: Let's make this the last one. Jim?

Q General, it's Jim Mannion again from AFP. I was wondering if you could put some numbers on the decline in attacks. And also, just to clarify, I thought I understood you to say that there's been an increase in militia attacks, and I was wondering if you could put a number on that and if you could say whether you mean Shi'ite militia attacks.

GEN. ANDERSON: Shi'ite militia is still the preponderance. The question is how much of them are rogue elements or part of the mainline, mainstream, if you will, be it JAM or other type militia. But militia attacks are still prevalent, are still significant. Preponderance is still Shi'a. It's still a factor around here, but again, assessment -- current assessment is on the decrease, not the increase.

COL. KECK: Okay. Numbers, sir? Do you have any specific numbers that you could characterize decline in attacks? Percentage or anything that you could give us?

GEN. ANDERSON: I don't have the data points with me. I would say the averages are down probably anywhere -- you know, typically you're running -- it depends on which multinational division you're talking about -- typically 85, 90ish for Baghdad, 75ish for up north. Each of those probably respectively -- again, it depends on what day, but trendwise you're probably talking a good 10 to 20 less per day at this point, obviously with Baghdad being the main concern. Some of the areas are still -- north, southeast, central, south, west -- are still fairly lower when compared to Baghdad to begin with, which is a key point. But the good news is they're all down. That's kind of a rough crack at it.

COL. KECK: Okay, sir. We appreciate it. And we thank you for your time today.

Do you have any closing comments you'd like to make?

GEN. ANDERSON: No. Thanks for your interest today. Things are on the improvement side. And again, we appreciate your interest in getting the right information out and helping cover the stories of our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines. But thanks for your support, and good luck to you all back there in Washington.

COL. KECK: Thank you. And it was very informative. And best of luck to you over there and we hope you all a success.

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