



U.S. Department of Defense
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Presenter: Commander, Multinational Division Center and 3rd Infantry Division Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch

**July 06,
2007**

DoD News Briefing with Maj. Gen. Lynch from Iraq

(Note: General Lynch appears via teleconference from Iraq.)

MODERATOR: Today's briefer: Major General Rick Lynch, commander of Multinational Division Center and the 3rd Infantry Division. His command took responsibility for operations in this sector in April, and he last spoke with us in May of this year. And today he's coming to us from the division's media center at Camp Victory. General Lynch has some opening statements and then will take some questions.

So with that, General, let's go straight to you.

GEN. LYNCH: Thanks.

And hey, folks. It's good to be back with you again today. It's important to do this. I know you're busy. Candidly, I'm kind of busy as well. But we got to make this time routinely to talk, so you better understand what we're doing over here.

This morning I want to cover several topics with you. I want to talk about Operation Marne Torch. I want to talk about post-combat operations. I want to talk about the support we're receiving from Iraqi citizens, and I want to give you an insight into upcoming operations.

As you know, I'm blessed to command Multinational Division Center and Task Force Marne, composed of elements of my 3rd Infantry Division, the 25th Infantry Division out of Alaska, and the 10th Mountain Division and many other magnificent organizations.

Our operating environment is the southern belt of Baghdad, both the Mahmudiyah and the Madain qadhas, and four of the southern provinces: Babil, Najaf, Karbala and, as of the 20th of June, Wasit province.

Our task and purpose is clear: block accelerants of violence into Baghdad, secure the population and defeat sectarian violence.

Let me give you a sense of how I think things are going

First, let's talk about Operation Marne Torch. As you know, Operation Marne Torch is part of the Corps offensive Operation Phantom Thunder, and it's been going on now for about three weeks. And it's designed to eliminate enemy sanctuary areas in the Tigris River Valley area of Arab Jabour, which is essentially the southeast quadrant of the Baghdad province.

During this operation, we focus on reducing the flow of accelerants of violence into Baghdad. Accelerants are defined as anything -- insurgents, weapons, materiel, IEDs, VBIEDs, ideology, anything -- that, left uncontrolled, would affect the security in Baghdad.

Operation Marne Torch has evolved into having three primary characteristics. We move fast and we strike hard, both on the ground and in the air. We engage with the local population and solicit their cooperation. And we exploit all forms of intelligence. All of our operations in Marne Torch are intelligence-driven.

Together with the Iraqi army and the Iraqi national police, we have discovered and destroyed weapons caches, we've interdicted boat transportation used by the enemy, and we've detained or killed numerous insurgents.

We are having an impact on the enemy, and we're experiencing some operational success.

But we're still in the early stage of the operation, way too early to see dramatic changes in the security situation in Baghdad.

Let me give you one example of that success. During Operation Stampede 3, which was conducted by our 3rd Brigade Combat Team, we uncovered two large caches of ordnance that could have been used to make a number of IEDs. We found more than 80 mortar rounds, 10 rockets, 15 pounds of plastic explosives, several artillery rounds, fuses, blasting caps and other components to be used to make IEDs. Obviously taking these munitions out of the hands of the enemy has made the area safer for both Iraqis and coalition forces. That was one big weapons cache but just one of the 41 caches we've found so far during Marne Torch over the past three weeks. We've also found 54 IEDs, getting them before they can get us or Iraqi civilians or Iraqi security forces, and we destroyed 45 boats -- boats that were being used by the enemy to transport insurgents and munitions.

During the operation, we've run nearly 500 patrols, many of them jointly with Iraqi security forces. We've conducted at least 22 raids, 32 cordon and search operations and 70 airstrikes. We've made extensive use of airpower -- B-1 bombers, F-16s and F-18s. We've cleared more than a thousand buildings and detained more than 230 insurgents, including 28 that we classify as high-value individuals, among them three of our Division 15 high-value targets.

We have taken real estate from the insurgents, and will now hold on to this terrain until competent, capable Iraqi security forces can provide the sustained security presence that'll keep the extremists away from the people of Iraq and from the government.

We have seen cooperation from the people that live in Arab Jabour; candidly, as many of you know, much more than I saw the last time I was here, which was only about a year ago, and that's indeed an encouraging sign of support. This support has come in the form of openness to us, peaceful coexistence with us and importantly in the form of information. In Multinational Division-Center now, we occupy 29 patrol bases out with the Iraqi population, and we're finding this openness with them to exchange information and help us with security.

What I sense is a growing discontent amongst the local communities, the tribes and their leaders, and we've benefitted from this discontent. Just as it happened in Ramadi, volunteers in an operational environment have emerged, and they say enough; enough of the violence, enough of the killing by al Qaeda; let us be part of the security forces.

What I believe is al Qaeda has worn out its welcome. They've overplayed their hand, and their tactics have indeed backfired.

Here's an example just on Wednesday. An Iraqi man out in Madain qadha of the Baghdad province -- that's just east of the Tigris River -- gave us information that led to the discovery and destruction of a massive weapons cache. We know this reduced the number of IED attacks on the Iraqi population, on the Iraqi security forces and on the coalition forces that are operating in that area.

Now we're entering another phase of our operation in Marne Torch, and it's entitled post-combat operations. Candidly, while we do post-combat operations, we're continuing to do combat operations in other portions of our battle space. We're reaching out to the Iraqi people with reconstruction efforts and humanitarian assistance.

Let me give you some examples. Task Force Marne has significantly improved the water infrastructure in Arab Jabour. Reconstruction of pumping stations and pipelines, repair of canals have had a positive impact on the lives of more than 2.2 million Iraqis. The bowery (ph) pump plant has been repaired by the Madain qadha government with financial assistance from us, and water is now flowing through the canals for the first time in several months. The Madain qadha's economy is agrarian based, so as you well know, this will indeed allow the farmers to prepare for the fall growing season, and as a result of that, they're very happy that coalition forces are there.

As part of our economic engagement strategy, we've identified six state-owned enterprises that will receive funding to improve their capacity. Improving their capacity will create a lot of new job opportunities for local people, especially military-age males, the kind of guys who want to get off the streets and into jobs so they can support their families and restore their dignity. You know, with the state-owned enterprises that we're dealing with, between now and October we believe we can employ 2,800 Iraqis, military-age males. Now, you might say that's not a big number, but that's 2,800 people who aren't going to be planting IEDs, because they got proper employment.

We're piloting a scrap metal initiative. There's lots of scrap metal in Iraq, and this initiative has the potential of creating a significant number of jobs and boosting economic development in North Babil. We're also advancing a government engagement strategy. The focus of this is to create stronger links between the provincial governments and the national government. Task Force Marne is acting as a conduit to the central government, and this month we'll host our first governors conference down in Hillah.

We chair bi-weekly security meetings with the Iraqi security forces and the local government. Just this last week, my 3rd Brigade Combat Team hosted the Madain qadha bi-weekly security meeting at their forward operating base. And these meetings develop combined Iraqi and coalition security plans for the coming week. Both sides share intelligence and develop future operations.

Even though we're working post-combat operations, intensive combat operations are still necessary.

As I've said before, in Multinational Division Center area, I believe there are four enemy sanctuaries, and Marne Torch is attacking one of those sanctuaries. And that's a Sunni extremist area, but there are others. There are additional enemy sanctuaries in our battlespace and they must be disrupted, just like Arab Jabour with Marne Torch.

Of note, the enemy is not just Sunni extremist networks. Shi'a extremists remain disruptive and unhelpful antagonists, and we find that they're often unfortunately foreign-supported. For the people of Iraq to live in peace and prosperity, these elements must be defeated as well. Upcoming operations will target both Shi'a and Sunni extremists.

We can't do this all by ourselves. We need the assistance of the Iraqi people, and I'm seeing more and more of that. I'm seeing more of the local population saying, we're tired of the violence; let us be part of the security; let us be part of the solution.

We also need the best effort of the Iraqi security forces. By the way, I sense that they're getting better every day. In my battlespace, I deal with two Iraqi army divisions: the 6th Iraqi Army Division and the 8th Iraqi Army Division. And those division commanders are competent, capable military professionals who are Iraqis. They're not Shi'a; they're not Sunni. They're Iraqis, and their enemy is anybody that's against Iraq. And they've got competent subordinate commanders as well.

Working with the Iraqi army, we have caught and detained several individuals that we classify as high-value targets: the baddest of the bad guys. And taking these folks off the streets give new hope to the communities where they were hiding. You've heard me say before that there aren't enough Iraqi security forces in my battlespace. That remains the case, but I have room for optimism. There is a significant effort by the Iraqi government to build security forces that are multi-ethnic, non-secular and that can bear the weight of Iraqi security responsibility.

Now recently we had a graduation down in North Babil of 1,000 recruits for Iraqi police, and those recruits are both Sunni and Shi'a, and they'll be used across North Babil. They'll provide security. In Yusufiya, in the center of my battlespace, we just had a recruiting drive for the Iraqi army, and 900 people enlisted in the Iraqi army.

So there is indeed room for optimism. I see progress, but there needs to be more. And with that, I'm happy to take whatever questions you might have.

MODERATOR: Thank you, sir.

Let's start off with Kristin.

Q Sir, it's Kristin Roberts with Reuters.

I want to follow up on the statements you made about the progress you're seeing in Iraqi security forces. We've heard from you on many occasions about the lack of competent and capable Iraqi security forces throughout many areas of your area of responsibility. Can you please characterize for us the pace of improvement that you're seeing and give us more detail about the about the type of progress they've been able to notch over recent weeks?

GEN. LYNCH: Oh, that's a great question. What I've said is across Multinational Division-Center's battlespace, which is about the size of the state of West Virginia, there is a significant shortage of Iraqi security forces. The ones that I deal with, particularly the Iraqi army, I find to be competent and capable. I go out every day four hours worth of battlefield circulation and where I go I normally run into coalition forces side by side with Iraqi army forces. So I went to a patrol base just yesterday and I found a great Iraqi army captain, and he was so very proud of what he's doing at that patrol base and proud of the security he's providing for the local population. The issue that I got in my battlespace has been the Iraqi police. Either it doesn't exist or in some cases the Iraqi police throughout there are either not competent or corrupt, and that's a problem. But that's working to be improved.

In north Babil, where they just had that graduation of a thousand police recruits, the fact that they are both Shi'a and Sunni is room for optimism. When I talked to the provincial director of police in Babil, he tells me where he's going to place these forces, and it is exactly the right place to ensure security.

So the issue comes down to number of Iraqi security forces. We can debate all the time about quality, but

the issue is not just quality, it's also quantity. You know, Arab Jabour, which has become an enemy sanctuary -- and that's why we're doing Marne Torch -- had a total void of any Iraqi security forces, and that's how it became an enemy sanctuary. That's what we have to preclude.

So we just got to work with the Iraqi government to continue to build more Iraqi security forces, and I see improvement in terms of the numbers of recruits.

MODERATOR: Pauline.

Q Pauline Jelinek of the Associated Press. If I could just follow on with the Iraqi security forces subject, you mentioned terrain has been taken and that potentially you'll like to hand it off to them. Can you talk about how that's going to work, how soon that could happen in some areas, and just generally describe when you think that can happen?

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, you know, the time issue and the time question is always the most difficult question. Everything takes time and everything takes longer than you think it's going to take. Some of the patrol bases -- the 29 patrol bases we have, we've already turned over to the Iraqi security forces. Remember, it's clear, then hold and then build, and what we do is we work through Marne Torch -- is we work aggressively with the Iraqi security forces, force to clear, and then there's got to be somebody to hold. And we're not going to go any deeper in Arab Jabour than we can hold, either coalition forces have to stay there or competent Iraqi security forces have to stand up to the plate and say, "I got this one. Go ahead and move south."

And that's happened now in some of the patrol bases. In other places, there just aren't any Iraqi security forces, so there's nobody to hand the security off to, so we have to stay there. And that's why I'm excited about the locals. I'm seeing more and more of the local population saying, "Hey, let us be part of the security. Let us be part of the security." They're not asking for weapons, they're not asking for ammunition. All they're asking for is recognition and some legitimacy, but that gives me some room for optimism.

MODERATOR: Dave.

Q General, Dave Wood from The Baltimore Sun. We've heard over and over during the past couple of years that the critical part of this whole U.S. effort in Iraq is not the military part, it's the economic and political part of it. In your AOR, is the United States government doing enough projects like the 2,800 jobs you mentioned you hope to get secured before October -- is there enough of that happening or are you disappointed that not more is happening?

GEN. LYNCH: Well, again, I was here for an entire year with General Casey as his deputy for Strategic Effects, and I worked the political and the military and the economic lines with the U.S. embassy. And what I see now when I come back is I see marked improvement with these things that we call embedded PRTs, Provincial Reconstruction Teams. And all of my brigades will soon have embedded PRTs, and they focus on capacity building at the local level, at the nahiya level, at the city level, and we're seeing progress.

For example, in one of my brigade combat teams working their EPRT, they've identified eight model communities, and they're working to enhance not just the security but the economic situation in those model communities, and I see great progress there.

Where I'm disappointed and where we got a lot of work to do is at the provincial level. We have to build capacity in my battlespace at the provincial level. We've got four provinces -- Babil, Karbala, Najaf and Wasit -- and there has to be competent, capable governors and provincial councils and folks inside the government that really focus on the needs of the Iraqis in their province and not on Shi'a or Sunni kind of lines. That's what's most important. So I think we got to work harder to ensure we get capacity at the provincial level, and PRTs are designed to do that.

MODERATOR: Courtney.

Q Hi, General. This is Courtney Kube from NBC News. You mentioned that the Shi'a extremists in your area you're seeing are forward-supported. Can you elaborate on that? I mean, who specifically is supporting them, and what's the evidence that you have that they are being supported?

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, thanks, Courtney. I appreciate the question. You know, across Multinational Division Center, there are three groups of enemy: It's Sunni extremists, it's Shi'a extremists and then it's those supported by Iranian influence. And what I have is just indicators of Iranian influence, and it's causing us great concern.

Since we've been here, the 4th of April, we've had 29 EFP attacks; 18 of those were effective attacks, and it killed nine of our soldiers. EFP technology has traced directly back to Iran, so those things that are coming from Iran, they're causing a great concern.

Over the last three months, we've found weapons caches -- four specific weapons caches, whereas we worked our way through those caches, we found Iranian munitions. We found Iranian rockets, we found Iranian mortars clearly marked with Iranian markings, and that is just unacceptable. So what's happening is these bad things are coming from Iran into Iraq, they're finding themselves in the hands of the extremists in our battlespace, and they're being used against coalition forces, against Iraqi security forces and against innocent Iraqis, and that just has to stop.

MODERATOR: Mike.

Q General, it's Mike Mount with CNN. My understanding is there's about 1,200 MRAPs now operating inside Iraq. Do you have any MRAPs in your AOR? And if you do, how are they performing against IEDs? And can you say whether, if you do have any, how are they performing against EFPs?

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, Mike, I have none of the MRAPs, and I'm not sure when they're coming in. I know there's a plan on the part of the Army and the theater here to get us the MRAPs; we have none now.

What I'm working with are the up-armored humvees. And now we're using the additional capability to enhance the protection on Bradleys. So for example, yesterday we had a deeply buried IED attack on one of our Bradleys. And when I look at their Bradley now, it's unrecognizable. It looks like two sets of tracks. But the soldiers in that Bradley were able to walk away from that attack. None of them were killed. One was pretty severely injured. But the up-armorings of their Bradleys helped a lot.

We're all excited about getting the MRAPs. Anything that improved the force protection of our soldiers, we're all excited about it.

Q General Lynch, this is Guy Raz from NPR. I was hoping that you could put your area of operation within the overall context of the strategy in Iraq -- the clear, hold, retain strategy. So for example, last week -- earlier this week, General Fil explained that in Baghdad, since mid-February, his troops have managed to clear or retain about 48 percent of the neighborhoods in Baghdad. And he divides Baghdad into about 470 neighborhoods.

In your area of operation, in your battlespace, could you sort of quantify what percentage of it is now in the clear or now in the hold and retain phase for us?

GEN. LYNCH: That's a good question, Guy. And it's -- you know, Joe -- Joe's one of my best friends, and we've grown up together, and we call -- we talk all the time. But his battlespace is really different than mine. He's fighting inside the city of Baghdad, and -- but the majority of our area, this battlespace the size of the state of

West Virginia, is a rural area.

But to get to your question, I'd say there's about 70 percent of our battlespace that has competent security forces occupying that battlespace. And there's still about 30 percent where there's not the security force it needs to be, and that's why these surge brigades were so very important. And that's why these operations, the one that we're doing now with Marne Torch and the ones that are fixing to come up to take away the enemy's sanctuary, are so very important.

So your question's a good question. I'd say about 70 percent we're in the clear and hold piece, and then there's about 30 percent that we're just taking the fight to the enemy right now.

Q (Off mike) -- you say is in the hold and retain phase?

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, in the retain phase, you know, we have significant pieces of our area where we're doing major construction operations with the Iraqi government, the local government, the provincial government. And I cited some out in the Madain qadha. So there is indeed a portion of my battlespace that's transitioned from clear to hold to retain. And again, it's about 70 percent where I'm comfortable that we've got security forces there, and we're working with the local government, the local people to maintain a persistent security presence. But there's about 30 percent that's still out there, that's enemy territory, and we have to take the fight to the enemy.

What the surge brigades allow me to do is have sufficient forces to take the fight to the enemy. That's what you're seeing now in Marne Torch and you'll see in upcoming operations over the next couple of months.

MODERATOR: Pam?

Q Sir, this is Pam Hess with United Press International. I know that you just got there in April, but could you explain to us how this area got to be an enemy sanctuary? You mentioned that the Iraqi security forces weren't good, but who turned over that battlespace to them? Who was watching it to make sure that it didn't go bad?

And once you get done with your work, looking forward, how long do you need to keep up this intense pace of operations and presence to prevent it from going back to being an enemy sanctuary?

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, Pam, thanks for the question. You always ask great questions.

The reason it became an enemy sanctuary is because nobody was there. You know, if you look back over the last four years in Arab Jabour, there's been a coalition operation there, but it never stayed there. And what happens with the enemy forces is, they fill the void. As soon as the security forces leave, the enemy comes back.

He's got to have a place where he can store munitions, build IEDs, conduct training, and places closer to Baghdad is what he's looking for, and that's what happened. So the idea of going there and then leaving doesn't work. You have to go there and you have to stay with a sustained security presence, and that's what we're trying to do now.

And again, you go back to the timing issue. I see these aggressive offensive operations that deny the enemy the four sanctuaries we have taking us through July, August and into September. But by then, based on our calculations, we will have denied the enemy those sanctuaries and we can transition into the hold and retain phase in those sanctuaries.

Q Sir, it's Jennifer Griffin from Fox News.

You talked about the Iranian influence. And Senator Joe Lieberman had an editorial in the Wall Street Journal this morning where he quoted General Bergner from Monday, talking about Hezbollah's influence. He called Iraq, Iran's proxy war.

Have you captured anybody who has come across from Iran? Do you have any high-value detainees that prove that Iranian influence? And can you give us more details about what you're seeing in terms of Iranian influence?

GEN. LYNCH: Now thanks, Jennifer.

We haven't captured anybody that we can directly tie back to Iran. What's concerning to me is the soldiers that we're losing to EFPs and, without a doubt, the EFPs are traced back to Iran. Their capability to manufacture those EFPs, the technology behind them, they all come from Iran. And to have the significant rocket attacks and the mortar attacks we have and then to find these weapons caches with Iranian rockets and mortars are of great cause for concern.

And then we study the enemy in our sector all the time, and there are indeed JAM special groups that are going into Iran, conducting training, refitting and then coming back to attack coalition soldiers and Iraqi security force soldiers. So I'm not into the politics of what's going on. I just tell you. We've got Iranian munitions. We've got EFPs attacking our soldiers and we've got training being conducted in Iran, all of which we're concerned about and we're working against.

Q Sir, it's Peter Spiegel with the Los Angeles Times. I just wanted to follow up on Pam's question. It's another timing one. I know you're not usually excited about that.

But you mentioned in your opening remarks that it was way too early to see positive effects yet really at all in Baghdad. You may have noticed, in the last few days, we've had a bit of a speeding up of what General Petraeus calls the Washington clock here -- a lot of moderate Republicans saying, we don't think the surge is working and whatnot and we've got to switch to a new strategy.

I'm just curious, as a division commander, to what extent you follow that debate and to what extent that affects your strategic thinking as you look forward over the next few months in terms of what amount of time you're going to have with these extra surge forces to do what you need to do.

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, I spend no time thinking about the political clock. I spend all my time focused on killing or capturing the enemy forces to do what we can do to build capacity and government and economic development in my battlespace.

That's my focus. And that, indeed, takes time.

So we didn't get the surge brigades here until ready for combat operations on the 15th of June. We've been working through this now for about three weeks, and as I showed you, significant progress. When you take away that many caches and that many IEDs, you kill about 50 of them, you detain a couple hundred more, that indeed is going to have an effect on the security situation in Baghdad. The problem is you're not going to see an instantaneous measurable effect, it's going to take a while. And when we start our next operation that's focused on both Sunni extremists and Shi'a extremists, you'll see effect, but it's not going to be an instantaneous effect, it's going to take some time.

So we keep getting the time questions, I don't worry about the political clock. I'm focused on killing or capturing the enemy in our battlespace. I'm focused on helping the Iraqi people to get some kind of a sustained security presence. That's what I focus on, and it's going to take a while. It's going to take a while.

Like I asked Pam, I think we're going to be doing detailed kinetic operations to deny the enemy sanctuary. It's going to take me July, August and end of September to do that, and then we'll be able to work the build and retain piece with more fidelity.

Q In answer to Guy's question, you said there's about 30 percent of your AOR that still does not seem to -- you haven't sort of poked around there yet. It would seem that with all the surge -- as you said, all the surge brigades in place now for about three weeks, in theory you should have all the forces you need to do that kind of stuff. Is that because there's been extra forces moved up to Diyala to deal with that unexpected contingency up there, or it's just a matter of flow on of forces and flow on of operations?

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, what you've heard before from all of the commanders here in Iraq is we never have enough forces, and we could use even more forces. It doesn't have to be coalition forces, but for sure Iraqi security forces to reach out.

So in my battlespace, there's 30 percent of the area that we still have to get to. Now, candidly, with the surge forces I've got the formations now that enable me to do that.

Q General, it's Jamie McIntyre from CNN. Just again to follow up on the same theme, if -- as you're no doubt aware, the mood in Washington is increasingly toward bringing those extra surge forces home sooner rather than later, in fact, some time in the next couple of months. How would that affect your ability to carry out your mission, given that you've said it's those surge forces that have given you the ability to go into these places?

GEN. LYNCH: It would be a mess, Jamie. It'd be a mess. Those surge forces are giving us the capability we have now to take the fight to the enemy, and the enemy only responds to force and we now have that force. You know, we can conduct detailed kinetic strikes, we can do cordon and searches, and we can deny the enemy the sanctuaries. If those surge forces go away, that capability goes away, and the Iraqi security forces aren't ready yet to do that.

So now what you're going to find if you did that, is you'd find the enemy regaining ground, re-establishing a sanctuary, building more IEDs, carrying those IEDs in Baghdad, and the violence would escalate. It would be a mess.

Q (Off mike.)

MODERATOR: AI, one more.

Q General, it's AI Pessin from Voice of America. A follow-up on Jamie's question. What can you say to the members of Congress, who seem to be increasingly impatient? What can you say to them to convince them to let you keep the surge forces to the end of the year or beyond or whenever you think you need to?

GEN. LYNCH: You know, people ask me all the time why I have so much confidence. I've got great confidence because I got great soldiers. And they're here fighting because they want to fight terrorists here so they don't have to fight terrorists back home. That sounds like a bumper sticker, but that's what they believe. They believe that if they don't do what our forefathers did, our children and their children won't enjoy the freedoms that we enjoyed coming up. So they're continuing to fight the good fight.

And candidly, if we don't fight the good fight here, I believe we're going to have to fight the fight back home, and none of us want that to happen. None of us want to experience 9/11 again. None of us want to have attacks on the American soil. So we got to fight the fight here.

And we need these surge forces. They came in for a reason. They're being used for the reason they came

in. It's going to take some time to mature the situation. Over time we can turn the area over to Iraqi security forces, and then we'll be ready to do something that looks like a withdrawal. But that's not going to happen any time soon.

Q When you say any time soon, if not September, which many in the United States would like to see, can you say maybe we'll be ready to do that in January, maybe in March? I mean, what kind of hope can you provide?

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, I wish I had some crystal ball. You know, over the last 30 years of my service to our nation, I've developed "Lynch's rules of warfighting," and one of the rules is, everything takes -- everything is timing, and the second rule is, everything takes longer than you think it's going to take. So it's silly for military professionals to say, "Let me predict the future." There are so many conditions over here that are variable, there are so many unknowns -- in how the enemy's going to respond, how the Iraqi security forces are going to respond, how the government of Iraq is going to do in building these Iraqi security forces. There are unknowns. So to say here's the date it's going to be okay would just be silly.

MODERATOR: The absolute last one.

Q General Lynch, it's Guy Raz again from NPR. Just a sort of a follow-up on some of the previous questions. As you know, the overall counterinsurgency strategy, time and troop numbers are your lifeblood. It's what you need to succeed. So I'm wondering -- I mean, you have to plan in the future. You're looking at what's going to happen in six months, what's going to happen in nine months, where you're going to be, what kind of time you're going to have, what kind of numbers you're going to have. And clearly, with the debate taking place in Washington, time and numbers are commodities you may not have. So, I mean, you have to be worried about that to some extent, aren't you?

GEN. LYNCH: Well, the advantage of being a division commander is I got clearly defined battlespace and I got a clearly defined task and purpose, and I now have the forces I need to conduct that mission. What I can't tell you is how long it's going to take to secure the population, defeat sectarian violence. It's going to take however long it takes, and you just have to be sensitive to that.

What you don't want to do is have military commanders who arbitrarily pick dates and those dates may not be able to be substantiated on the ground based on changing conditions.

So I know you want to -- you want some kind of definitive answer to the time question, but we can't give that to you. What we can give you, in fact, is we've got the forces we need right now, we're working with the Iraqi security forces to have sustained security presence, and we'll continue doing what our nation needs us to do.

MODERATOR: Well, sir, we appreciate it. We have come to the end of our time. We are certainly glad you shared some thoughts with us today. We'd like to give it back to you for any closing remarks.

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, first, just like I started, thank you for taking the time. Thank you for what you do, and what you do is very important to the American public. And just know that the commanders over here appreciate what you do.

You know, on the 4th of July, I had the great opportunity to be involved in the re-enlistment ceremony and the citizenship ceremony for about 600 great Americans; 500-plus soldiers re-enlisted, almost 200 soldiers became American citizens, and by golly, I was so very proud to be part of that. And every day when I'm out and about wearing 60 pounds of body armor in 111 degree temperature, I re-enlist soldiers, and they raise their right hand and say, "I'll support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic." And they're doing that between attacks, between memorial services, between mortar rounds coming in, so I just take such confidence in the fact that we got great Americans who have committed themselves to

service to our nation, and I'd like you to have that same encouragement.

You know, it bothers me when people say the Army is on the verge of breaking. We'll never break because we've got great soldiers.

Thanks for what you do, and thanks for spending time with me this morning. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you again, sir.

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