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Presenter: Deputy Commander of Multinational Force-Iraq and Senior British Representative in Iraq Lt. Gen. Graeme Lamb

**July 16, 2007 9:00 AM
EDT**

DoD News Briefing with Lt. Gen. Lamb from Iraq

JIM TURNER (deputy director, Press Office): General Lamb, this is Jim Turner in the Pentagon Briefing Room. Can you hear me?

LT. GEN. LAMB: Yes, just about. Yup, I got it, I think.

MR. TURNER: All right. I'll talk slowly.

Good morning. Our briefer today is Lieutenant General Graeme Lamb of the British Army and deputy commander of Multinational Force- Iraq. General Lamb is also the senior British military representative in Iraq, and he assumed command in late August 2006. This is his second briefing to the Pentagon press corps, and if you recall, he last spoke with us in January of this year.

General Lamb is here today to provide us with an operational update. I think we'll find his perspective helpful.

Before we get to your questions, General Lamb -- he will provide opening comments, and with that, General Lamb, I'll turn it over to you.

LT. GEN. LAMB: Hey, that's really kind. It is an absolute pleasure to return to this side of the camera, and I think I said that with a relatively straight face. When I go to hell I'm going to find myself gardening and in front of a camera, so I'm not very good at this, and you'll just have to wear with me.

I could have done a long introduction written by somebody who knew what they were talking about and spoken by myself who is still struggling to understand the complexity of the campaign that we find ourselves here some 11 months on from when I first came.

To remind you, I stood last time, as you said, in January. I've soldiered for some 35 years; it shows, I think. George Orwell once said that at age of 50, every man has the face he deserves. I'm an old-fashioned sort of guy. I still believe in duty, sacrifice, service, defense of the realm. I have, I think, a useful spirit. I came out here, but I'm now well worn. I think working for America does that to you. I missed the entire snowboarding season in the Alps, came out for a six-month tour -- which is a very British approach to these campaigns, and I

think we've got better -- and my replacement will extend out to nine, which is right and proper.

And I extended it for a month to ensure the hand over between Pete Chiarelli and Ray Odierno went well, on the basis we were losing our two-star out of the core headquarters. General Petraeus -- who I knew from old; we were here in 2003 -- was passing through London, and he cut what I think was rather a foolish deal, that I should be extended by another four months. And London, I think we're grateful for the opportunity to keep me out here and not back in their face.

I recall, when I spoke last time, of the campaign, I said two things. I used that old maxim from Wellington Waterloo when he referred to the day as "hard pounding." It's been hard pounding for the young men and women who are out in the battlespace every day. I read about them, I hear about them, I meet them, and I see them.

These are ordinary people who are doing quite extraordinary things across the coalition. Most of them are Americans. And for America, you should be enormously proud of what I see your Marines, you Air Force, your Navy, your Army and the civilians who are in the fight out here, as to what they do, and gladly.

The second point was on complexity. I referred to this as complex as complex as I had ever been -- ever seen. I tied it up in saying it was like doing three-dimensional chess in a dark room. Somebody qualified that after I'd said it, and I think he's probably got it better than I did, which is three-dimensional chess in a dark room while being shot at. And that's a bit like it is out here.

But with that, I'm sure, rather than rabeting on about what I want to tell you, I'll open it up to questions, so you can ask me, and I'll try and give you a straight answer. And so it's over to questions at the Pentagon. Thank you.

MR. TURNER: Well, thank you, sir. Let's get started.

Q Sir, it's Pauline Jelinek of the Associated Press. Britain's independent commission, as you know, yesterday issued a report on Iraq policy -- he can't hear? He can't hear.

(Pause.)

LT. GEN. LAMB: The link is really bad, and my hearing's shot away over, like I said, my time. Can you run that one again really slowly?

Q Do you think it's the microphone?

MR. TURNER: Try it and see.

Q Okay. Britain's independent commission on Iraq policy yesterday -- (inaudible).

LT. GEN. LAMB: (Off mike) -- going to work. I'm sorry. It's just the link is really bad. I think what we're going to have to do is work it through a handset at this end, where somebody will tell me what the question is. I apologize. I'm sure it's the British link in the technological chain, but I just can't hear what's being said.

Q Okay. Sir, Britain's independent commission on Iraq policy yesterday suggested it's best not to look at the security situation in Iraq but rather the readiness of Iraqi security forces when considering when British troops can withdraw or draw down.

And he's not getting it.

LT. GEN. LAMB: I do apologize. It's a bit like listening to you if your head was in a bucket of water and

you occasionally bring it out. It is just almost impossible to capture what is being asked by way of a question. And therefore I'll give you an unfortunately poor answer. I apologize for that, but the link just isn't tied up here that's -- that makes it work.

Try again?

MR. TURNER: Just stand by for a moment.

(Pause.)

Q Sir, it's Pauline Jelinek of the Associated Press. Britain's independent commission yesterday suggested Iraqi security force readiness should be the key to when British troops withdraw or draw down. We've heard a lot of different estimates on when Iraqi security forces will be ready. What is your best thinking? When will Iraqi forces be ready for a drawdown in coalition troops, and specifically British troops?

LT. GEN. LAMB: I'm probably only getting about one word in three, and therefore the detail of the question is being entirely lost at the moment.

MR. TURNER: If you could stand by for a moment. Let me see if we can try an alternative link.

(Pause.)

LT. GEN. LAMB: Okay. So run that one again?

STAFF: She was asking when will Iraqi security forces be ready for the coalition forces to -- (long pause)

--

LT. GEN. LAMB: My reply would be that Prime Minister Maliki has recently said in the last few days, when he talked about saying, you know, we're ready to take over -- at the same time, he then qualified that by addressing issues of training and some of the equipment.

There are a great number of the Iraqi units that are in the fight with us here in Baghdad, north up in Diyala, Salahuddin, down south in Babil, Basra, of course, out west and all the rest here who are operating in every way ready to take over the battlespace. They own the battlespace in many places, and that's already been passed over.

As to their ability with logistics, some of the command and control, some of the combined force aspects, some with the technological capabilities we bring to the fight -- air, UAVs, some of the intelligence parts -- those bits are not yet in place.

This is a very dangerous enemy we face - agile, deceitful, barbaric and challenging. It's important that, therefore, in fact all those facets of our force are brought to bear in order to make the battle unfair, to our advantage, so we can either detain, destroy or kill the enemy. And the Iraqis are not quite there yet to be able to do that sort of complex battlespace management that I know the American army do so very well out here and members of the coalition can bring together.

So, not yet getting there. Some equipment issues, some command and control, some training, but all the indications from what we see in the battlespace is they will be there and are doing rather well in very difficult circumstances.

Thank you.

MR. TURNER: We have a new phone line, so try the mike there, Kristin.

Q Sir, it's Kristin Roberts with Reuters. Are you hearing this?

LT. GEN. LAMB: Just. Again, it's very difficult. Keep going, yeah.

Q Okay. Last week the Bush administration delivered a report to the U.S. Congress that painted a picture of the Iraqi security forces as deeply divided along sectarian lines. Over your six months in Iraq, can you tell us what progress, if any, you've seen in diminishing that sectarian influence?

LT. GEN. LAMB: Roger. Again, I was getting about one in three there, but I think the question -- just confirm I'm right -- it's a picture that is being painted back in the United States which sees the Iraqi armed forces in deeply divided sectarian lines. And the comment was, how do I see that over the last six months or the nine months that I've been here. Is that correct? Over.

Q Yes. That's correct, yes.

LT. GEN. LAMB: Sorry. Sorry. Again, I do apologize. I think deeply divided would be not how I would see it. I think there are elements of the police, in particular, less so with the Army, where there is a clear sectarian bias within those forces. When we find individuals who have reports of unit elements who are guilty of taking the sectarian divide into their work, then we pursue those down, and we'll take the individuals, arrest them and put them through the Iraqi criminal justice system.

I think that -- quite often people say, you know, there are not poor soldiers; there are only poor leaders. And the Iraqi forces, with the American and the coalition forces but principally the American forces, are working extremely hard, as are the Iraqi ministries. Minister Bolani, who runs the Ministry of the Interior, I think has removed 11,000 members of the police force who were considered to have a sectarian bias. I know he has something like 4,000 who are in the criminal justice system for review.

So the Iraqis themselves, the ministries and departments, are looking to address these issues. They're not solved overnight, and it would be wrong for me to imply that this was an easy and quick fix. But at the same time, I think the term "deeply divided" and "along sectarian lines" would be misleading. And I've seen over my time here people addressing, looking to improve and deliver a force that is Iraqi rather than sectarian.

Thank you.

Q Sir, Jonathan Karl with ABC News. I wonder if you can give an overall assessment of what the additional surge of U.S. forces -- what kind of an impact that is having and what the consequences would be of beginning to withdraw forces from Iraq, and finally, the real broad overview of what, in your mind, are the prospects for something that can be called "success" in the -- you know, over the next year, 18 months?

LT. GEN. LAMB: Got it. There's -- you nearly put in three questions there, I think. One was the impact of the surge, the second was the consequences of withdrawal of those forces early and how I would see success in the next year to 18 months. Is that correct, over?

(Pause.)

Q Yes.

LT. GEN. LAMB: Yep? It is? Sorry. Sorry. (Chuckles.) All right. I'm sort of caught between this sort of twilight zone and my -- what's been (inaudible) through my ears.

The surge -- again, it only came to full power, all 20 BCTs, the 15th of last month. The offensive which followed, therefore, that buildup in time and placement, has now only been going for slightly less than a calendar month. I see progress. I see progress in Diyala and Salahuddin, Nineveh. I see progress in Baghdad, out west and down south.

Is there a ways to go? Yes. The surge has allowed General Petraeus, General Odierno, the Corps to go to places where they have not been before, and you've heard that from the ground commanders, and they speak far more eloquently than I can on what that means -- Randy Mixon, Joe Fil, Rick Lynch, Jonathan Shaw down south. It has made a significant difference to our ability to close with the enemy and then pursue him, to be able to in fact take the initiative, which as soldiers we understand is important in the pursuit of this campaign.

So one month in. There's two months yet to run before the September honest assessment by Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus as to how they see the situation, and then a ways beyond that.

So within the first calendar month, good progress, steady momentum, hard fighting, going places where they haven't been before, I see unequivocally -- unequivocally -- that this surge is making a difference.

As to the consequences of an early withdrawal, what I think you can get from my genesis of the first part of this question -- that I think it would be untimely to move what I see as a successful campaign on the security line of operation, north, west, south and in Baghdad itself, at the point we're making progress, that we're pursuing the enemy, forcing him onto his back foot and onto our front foot, to let up on that pressure, to allow him to recover, to readjust, to go to places which he knows well and we pushed him out of. And those places have been a sanctuary for him.

Again, you'll have had many briefings from, as I said, far more elegant and far more knowledgeable American officers in the fight and in the field as to those caches, those facilities, hospitals, torture chambers, their ability to intimidate, hold people and keep a vast array of material -- homemade explosives, which are not made overnight -- a cache the other day down in An Anbar, nearly, I think -- about just short of 250 ready-made IEDs, 16 deep-placed IEDs north of Baqubah, passed over by a local.

That would have taken a good 16 days, probably a calendar month, to get those buried in and made, lost in a day to the enemy.

So the consequence of moving, while we are pushing out, detaining, killing, denying, along with the Iraqi army, and of what is a significant proportion with the Iraqi people who are out there, the consequence of withdrawing at that time, this time, would be unhelpful.

What do I see as success? I believe we are doing reasonably well. I think the course of action we are on is making a difference. It was Eisenhower that said, you know, the plan is nothing, planning is everything. We've done a great deal of planning. We have a clear view as to how we lay down our forces, where we place them and how we pursue the security line of operation. What that gives is, for the provincial councils, for the Iraqis out in the provinces, for this government, opportunity.

So I sense we're on a fair course right now. That doesn't mean we won't hit troubled waters. That doesn't mean we may not have to make some adjustments to the sheets, to our angle of attack in the sea, but I reckon we're on a fair course right now; be a shame to change it. Thank you.

Q General, it's Jamie McIntyre from CNN. No doubt you're aware of the growing disillusionment with the war back here in Washington, the growing sentiment in our Congress to bring U.S. troops home sooner. And I'm wondering if you could just give us an idea of how that's affecting the mood over there. And I noted at the beginning of your remarks you sounded a little worn down yourself. I know that was given in a humorous vein, but many a truth is said in jest. So what is your straight assessment of how the mood is being affected by all this war

weariness here in Washington.

LT. GEN. LAMB: Yeah. They've cracked the technology, so that was a lot clearer. I'm now back on line. I do apologize to those early speakers. But -- yeah, it's now coming back and talking to me.

Here we go. The mood -- (pause) -- let me take this out, otherwise it keeps on -- that's good.

Jamie, the mood. Coming back I may be a little tired. Yeah, you're right. My experience of this and every other war and every other campaign and the operations that I've been on is -- is it sort of sucks your soul out. It -- you know, your motivation, your commitment, your drive, all men and women doubt you. You know, the young people, men and women that are out in the battlespace right now are the men and women in the arena; you know, you, most certainly, and I even, in effect, sitting in the Green Zone most of the time, although I do occasionally get out and touch reality, are the critics.

This is wearing. It's hard work. It demands a great deal. It's a 24/7 truly commitment that we're on, and I'm only doing 11 months, whereas actually the Americans have been doing a year and for many extended to 15. What I find quite extraordinary is the ease, understanding which they've made the transition from 12 to 15 months, a sense that this is the right place, this is the right time; this is not that moment when you just think, "I can't take another pace." This is the time, actually, you just take that extra step, and the person who is on your shoulder, who you thought was going to win, just drops by the wayside.

The mood out here, hell, soldiers always fight for their comrades, for what they believe in in the near tear. They're interested in about a square meal, maybe if they could find some linen sheets, which would be novel; courage, doing the right thing, always being tested, never wanting to be the weak link. So I sense that their commitment and mood I find humbling.

They in no way show any sense of it's too difficult.

Do they talk about the mood back in Washington, the mood back in Westminster? Those who are not going out every day in a humvee, you know, tidy a piece of kit, up-armor it as best we can make it, with the sort of support that I don't think any Army, Marine, Air Force or Navy has enjoyed in our history of combat. But they're out every single day. They probably find it just a little wearing that their sense of the reality of the situation they find themselves in, the Iraqis who are dying alongside them at three times our rate, who are committed to this fight, who believe that we will endure, we will endeavor and we will give this country, you know, a better peace.

They see -- which is seldom reported -- you know, some of the money getting through, banks opening -- I saw today -- Hit, Ramadi, Rutbah, Fallujah. They see provincial councils -- I think one in Nineveh has just approved 447 projects at \$226 million worth of Iraqi money. It will take a ways to get that done, but they see that. They see water going to people who didn't have it before. They see electricity coming on line. They see stability to the networks. They see all the stuff that no one really portrays. They also see the bombs. Occasionally they see the progress they're making.

And what they find, I think -- just a touch difficult -- is, while it's so clear to them that we're making progress, it's not reflected by those who are not in the fight but are sitting back and making judgment upon what they can see with absolute clarity. Thank you.

MR. TURNER: We have time for one last question.

Q Sir, it's Kimberly Dozier with CBS News. I have kind of a combination question. One of your predecessors in the British military command had a lot of criticism for U.S. strategy and tactics, especially in the first two years, saying that there was a very patchy or no application at all of any counterinsurgency campaign. In the past two years would you say that that's changed?

And are you -- second of all, these clear and hold operations -- we've seen them so many times in the past four years; what happens when you pull out? What's going to be different this time? Every time we see you pull out of a neighborhood or a town, within weeks, if not a month, the insurgents are back. What's different?

(Pause.)

LT. GEN. LAMB: I just suddenly lost you there. I got the end of "town"; you still around?

Q Just to follow up, that whenever we see coalition forces withdraw from a town or a neighborhood in Baghdad, within weeks the insurgents are back.

LT. GEN. LAMB: Yeah, I got all that. Sorry. Your first name?

Q Kimberly. Kimberly Dozier. Kimberly?

LT. GEN. LAMB: Kimberly. Kimberly, sorry. I've taken that out -- because otherwise, I'd hear myself mumbling back to myself about five seconds after the event. I just can't handle it. It's beyond my can.

The first one -- two things I'd make by way of observation on that -- one of my predecessors -- it was -- I think it was somebody at the Royal College of Defence Studies who had been out here who wrote that article. What I found intriguing when that article was written -- because it was fairly forthright; it was pretty rude; you know, the British can do that -- we had an empire and lost it, so it works for us -- was that the then chief of your Army, chief of staff of the Army, Pete Schoomaker -- one hell of a soldier -- said that he wanted every officer to read the article on the basis -- it was maybe not how you saw yourselves, but it was an observation from a good friend as how others saw you. That showed huge moral courage, I think, just quality leadership.

I think there was some truth in that two years ago. I would say that if I was an American soldier, American officer, I could probably write an article today which may well throw the boot on the other foot and say, "Oh, Britain, are you learning fast enough from what the counterinsurgency experiences, this new generation of American soldiers, Marines, airmen and sailors are learning here in Iraq?" And I would say we most certainly should and could.

You have come on enormously. You have this enormous capacity on you, just a huge, big machine, but you have the ability and the energy to move things at an extraordinary rate, and you've managed to do that. Now, in no small way do people like General Petraeus -- you know, it's about getting the JSSs, establishing in fact people back into the -- out in the towns, in amongst the people. General Casey set the conditions for that; General Petraeus then moved it on and then took what is now your emerging and established counterinsurgency approach and put it into the practical, pragmatic, operational field that is Iraq. So I'd say that we are looking quite hard at what you're learning, have learned and are then enacting here in Iraq.

On your second question on clear and hold, again, it is a very fair question. What about the vacuum that goes in behind? What is different from the operations that we've done over time?

The mark of a really great nation, a really great army, a really great armed force is its ability to learn and quickly, and I sense that is what has happened. The vacuum that existed that was filled before is now being filled with two things. One is being filled by Iraqis, who are in and now owning the fight. You heard of the Al Anbar Awakening. I saw the awakening in Anbar; I was part of that in the early days. I expected it to take some time to come fruition, to establish itself -- typically cautious British approach. What was surprisingly was how quickly it emerged in a slightly different guise but with the same tenets of the local people, the tribes, the -- wishing to push back against al Qaeda out in Diyala, Salahuddin, Nineveh, down south, even in Baghdad itself.

So you have, therefore, people being brought in to the government of Iraq security structures as PSUs trained in a shorter time scale, go through all the back tests and the like, and then brought into the fight local perspective; some of that assisted by people who were in the insurgency, who fought against us -- all of this done with an absolute transparency with the current government of Iraq.

So on the one hand, you have therefore local security forces filling that vacuum, that space because we just don't have enough, you know, even the 160-plus thousand troops; I know Iraqi armed force and police it's 350,000-360,000. This is a big country. So you have security forces filling that space.

The second thing I'm now seeing, I was in a meeting just recently with Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih, whereby he chaired a meeting where you had Trade, you had minister of Finance, you had Transportation, you had deputies from -- (word inaudible) -- which were looking at in fact how to get services, food, medical supplies, immediate support in behind that. You have people like the Brinkley (sp) group who's out here and the like looking towards how you can start up and establish vo-tech programs, start to look at the opportunities of standing up what were all state-owned enterprises, some which are not hugely viable but they can sustain; but they do employ those others that are hugely attractive -- clothing factories, ceramics factories out in -- out west, and to fill that space therefore with employment and opportunity. That's the difference.

And that is, therefore, a combination of both what the coalition is doing, what the Iraqi security forces are doing, what the Iraqi people on the ground are doing, and what the Iraqi government are doing. The sum of the parts is so much greater than where we were before, and the difference should not be underestimated. Thank you.

MR. TURNER: Thank you, General Lamb, for your insights.

Before we close, would you care to make any closing comments?

STAFF: Any closing comments?

LT. GEN. LAMB: Yeah. I'll give you a quote, actually, because I did dig around, find some quotes here. I've got some really naughty ones, but I thought this would be better, since it's Theodore Roosevelt when he talked to the Sorbonne in 1910. The one he's remembered for is the bit that talks about the critic in the arena and all that side of life here. Well, I rather like the end of that particular set that -- that particular paragraph when he talks -- you know, they love to linger over the "war-worn Hotspur," and "not the memory of the young lord who, but for the violent (sic; vile) guns, would have been a valiant soldier."

The bit I want to go on is about two paragraphs down, because I think it captures what I see that is, in many ways, a sort of reflection on all that America needs to think about of its young people that are out here and engaged in this enterprise.

Let those who have kept -- "let those who have not, strive to attain a high standard of cultivation and scholarship. Yet let us remember that these stand second" -- second -- "to certain other things. There is a need of a sound body and even more of a sound mind, but above mind and above body stands character. The sum of those qualities, which we mean when we speak of a man" -- and I would include a woman -- a man and woman's "force and courage, of his good faith and sense of honor. We must ever remember that no keenness, no subtleness of intellect, no polish, no cleverness in any way make up for the lack of the great solid qualities: self-restraint, self-mastery, common sense, the power of accepting individual responsibility and yet acting in conjunction with others, courage and resolution. These are the qualities which mark a masterful people."

It's been a pleasure to have served here. Thank you.

MR. TURNER: Again, sir, thank you. We appreciate your remarks.

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