



U.S. Department of Defense

Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs)

News Transcript

On the Web:

<http://www.defenselink.mil/cgi-bin/dlprint.cgi?http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2006/tr20060217-12529.html>

Media contact: +1 (703) 697-5131

Public contact:

<http://www.dod.mil/faq/comment.html>

or +1 (703) 428-0711

Presenter: Commander, Iraqi Public Order National Police Transition Teams, Col. Gordon 'Skip' Davis

February 17, 2006

DoD News Briefing with Col. Davis

JIM TURNER: Colonel Davis, this is Jim Turner in the Pentagon Briefing Room. Can you hear me?

COL. DAVIS: Jim, I sure can.

MR. TURNER: Let's get started.

Today our briefer is Colonel Skip Davis. He is the commander of the Special Police Transition Team, National Police Order Division. Colonel Davis and his soldiers oversee training for the Iraqi National Police, and he's speaking from Baghdad to provide an update on an important training.

Today's briefing is on the record. Please identify yourself and your organization, because he can't see you.

And with that, Colonel Davis, I'll turn it over to you.

COL. DAVIS: Jim, thanks.

Good morning. I'm Colonel Skip Davis, commander of the 2nd Brigade, 78th Division, which is headquartered at Fort Drum, New York. And here in Iraq I command the Public Order Special Police Transition Teams. We've been working with the Public Order Special, or now National, Police for nearly 11 months. This morning I'd like to talk with you about the Public Order National Police and our teams serving with them.

The first public order brigade was formed in November 2004 upon completion of a six-week training course and shortly thereafter deployed to Fallujah, where it assisted in the final clearing of the city and reestablishment of law and order with Multinational Forces West. Successive public order brigades completed training between late December 2004 and mid-May 2005. The division headquarters was formed in July of last year.

The division's mission is to conduct counterinsurgency and security operations to defeat enemy forces and restore, then maintain, public law and order. The Public Order Division typically accomplishes its mission by conducting raids, cordon-and-search operations, providing area and fixed-site security, and reinforcing local police. Each of the public order's four brigades has three battalions, a combat support company and a

headquarters and support company.

Public order forces have had long-term deployments to Fallujah and Samarra and are currently deployed to Ramadi and Salman Pak as well as throughout Baghdad. They have conducted missions all over Baghdad and the surrounding provinces. They operate both independently and in concert with coalition forces and other Iraqi security forces.

Two public order brigades have assigned battlespace. The public order division is supported by special police transition teams who are SPTTs, and there's a SPTT assigned to each public order battalion, each brigade headquarters and a division headquarters. And as SPTTs, we coach, train, teach, mentor and advise our respective public order unit through training and daily contact, planning, preparing for and executing combat operations. We serve as liaisons with coalition forces and coordinate coalition support.

Lastly, we provide assessments of national police capabilities to assist in the strategic transition to Iraqi control.

And each of the 17 teams I command consists of 11 U.S. servicemen, including soldiers, sailors and Marines and up to four Iraqi interpreters.

And with that, I'd be happy to take your questions.

MR. TURNER: Bob.

Q Colonel, this is Bob Burns at Associated Press.

Would you address the issue that comes up pretty regularly about the complaints that Shi'ites in the Ministry of Interior forces are carrying out vigilante and other ethnic-based attacks against Sunnis, that this is driving more Sunnis onto the side of the insurgency?

COL. DAVIS: Okay, Bob, I think I understand the question. It's coming a little bit broken from this end.

But what I would say is that first and foremost, our formations within the national police and specifically the public order police are mixed formations. We have both Shi'a and Sunni. As of right now, the public order division is roughly just under 80 percent Shi'a and 20 percent Sunni, and a very small percentage of Kurds and Christians and some others.

There are Sunni brigade commander -- there's a Sunni brigade commander and several battalion commanders and several deputy commanders, both brigade and battalion, that are Sunni, so it would be specifically very difficult for these leaders to carry out what we consider sectarian-based or biased operations.

In fact, our detainee population is mixed. So within the public order -- police specifically, we haven't seen that kind of specific sectarian-based type of targeting.

MR. TURNER: Take it.

Q I'm Caroline Drees from Reuters, and I apologize if you already mentioned this earlier.

I was wondering if you could outline the difference between the public order police and other police units, first of all.

Secondly, how many members of the public order police we're talking about?

And thirdly, what sort of the main problems are that you've encountered in training and operations with this police force?

COL. DAVIS: Okay.

Let me take the second one first in terms of how many members, Caroline.

There are currently 9,000 public order policemen, and that takes into account 1,100 who just graduated from a six-week training course at Numaniyah, and that's where we get all of our candidates. They're recruited and then trained and then provided to the public order police.

We differentiate them primarily by mission, as I explained earlier. The public order police, like the special police commandos, like the 1st Mech Brigade, are high-end national police. They focus more on counterterrorism, counterinsurgency threat that exists, anything that goes beyond what local Iraqi station or patrol police can deal with. So they handle anything beyond that which the local police can't handle. In fact, there's a very close relationship where the Iraqi police will come to, in our case, the national police of public order and pass on targets, or targets they believe are beyond their capability.

In terms of problems, I'd like to address both problems and, say, successes.

But in terms of problems, almost like any Iraqi security force, we've had difficulty in professionalizing the force over time just based on the fact that they're coming out of a -- their basis of experience is pre-Saddam Iraqi army, with those biases that those forces had, as well as a very -- a lack of a professional and a strong NCO core, and that's really where our major problem is in terms of unit control or individual discipline.

We find it as soon as we have trained the leaders, then the training that we provide the special police or national police sticks, and we're still very, very short on NCOs, but we've got a plan in place throughout 2006 to bring us up to the authorization that we require for the national police.

MR. TURNER: Pam?

Q This is Pam Hess with UPI. How short are you on NCOs? And on -- to follow up on Bob's question, the Ministry of Interior, my impression is that if there are these so-called death squads, they're sort of freelancing. It wouldn't be from your leaders, but from people who are using their training and the organization and the weapons that they have and maybe the uniforms to get up to some mischief or -- for lack of a better word. What's your experience with that? Do you sense that that's going on in Public Order Battalions, or do you feel like that is limited to special police commandos or other groups?

COL. DAVIS: Well, Pam, first, on the NCOs. We're currently -- we currently have 8 percent of our authorization. We have probably another 10 percent that we're going to submit for validation as NCOs, because they were NCOs in the prior ex-Iraqi army, and it requires a vetting process to get them through that. And then, there's a plan throughout the year to both recruit more NCOs as well as train them at a special police academy that just started training junior NCOs in January, and we've got about 40 plus, almost 50 candidates in that course right now which will graduate next week.

In terms of your latter question and vigilante action, we feel very secure within the Public Order Division, and I'm -- certainly my partner, Jeff Buchanan, and the special police commandos would say the same thing about the fact that we don't have vigilantes running about without our supervision or without our knowing it. As I said, we've got a team with every single battalion. There are no separate company bases that would be perhaps underneath the or outside of our oversight or supervision. We do -- we accompany them on all their

missions. We also see where those detainees go because we help in the processing and medical screening of every detainee that comes in.

So it'd be extremely difficult if -- I can't rule out the possible. It's nearly impossible to hide that from the Special Police Transition Teams, so I don't think that that exists within the national police we work with, and we certainly haven't seen any of it in SPTT.

Q Can I follow up? If that's true, then that would suggest that it's not going on at all, and in fact bodies are turning up. Are people thinking that the perpetrators of this are posing as special police, that they've gotten the uniforms and that are going that way?

COL. DAVIS: I'm not sure, Pam, if I can really answer that question because my total focus in life is supporting these -- the special police, the national police, so I don't have -- I haven't run into experience with death squads or vigilante teams. We do know that there are uniforms available from the old regime as well as those purchased by local contractors. So if -- that's a possibility, certainly, but not something that we've experienced.

Q Sorry. One more clarification on the NCOs. What does 8 percent -- what does that translate to in numbers? How many is that?

COL. DAVIS: We've got -- currently, we have a little over 150, and we're authorized 2,000. We've got another hundred that are waiting right now to be vetted. It's actually just a little over a hundred. And then, if I get the next additional 50 that I'm expecting at the -- next week, all totaled, that would bring me up to about 15 going close to 20 percent of authorization.

Q Colonel, it's Mike Mount with CNN.

Going back to the question of problems, one of the problems we've seen in other police units and training units is the infiltration of insurgents within. Have you had any of those kind of problems, and how are you preventing that from occurring in your group, if you have managed to prevent it?

COL. DAVIS: Sure. Well, first off, we haven't found anyone within the public order police who is a -- who we considered an enemy or an infiltrated insurgent or terrorist. We have in fact picked out a cadet while he was still down at the training course -- because all the names we get for the recruits are vetted through MOI, and so they check their databases, and one was taken out at graduation simply because they identified and cross-checked that name.

In terms of other potential insurgents or terrorists within the group, they have very tight operational security measures that they employ which prevents, I would say, the loss of operational security or information getting out.

But more importantly, there are a heck of a lot of strongly willed patriots amongst that group, and if they believed one of their own may be an insurgent or terrorist, then they would pick them out right away because that puts their own lives on the line, as well as those of their families. So in some ways they're policing themselves. And we have had a number that have gone absent, small numbers, and we don't know if the work was too tough or if they were pressured out.

Q This is Jim Mannion from Agence France Press. You say that the public order battalions are mixed ethnically. What is the percentage of Sunnis versus Shi'a? And it seems to me that the larger problem are the other police forces, the local police forces that I think at this point don't have embedded trainers with them, and are locally recruited and, therefore, might be more susceptible to using force against other ethnic groups. Could

you -- I understand that that's not your focus, but could you just address that challenge?

COL. DAVIS: Jim, let me take your first question. I may have said this early on in the briefing. But right now, we're just about a little over 20 percent of Sunni within the Public Order Division writ large. And although the percentages may differ by battalion, as high as plus-25 percent and as low as about 15 percent, but generally that's the range. That's not too different from Iraqi society in terms of representation. And in fact, our plans are for the next recruiting class to have it all non-Shi'a, which would increase the overall percentage in the Public Order Division upwards of over 30 percent. So that would be -- that's a good thing, and that's a plan that the MOI fully endorses, as do the Public Order leaders.

And in terms of your second question, what I would tell you is that there's a huge effort from MNF-I, Multinational Forces Iraq, down to MNC-I, to establish Police Transition Teams that's ongoing right now, which addresses your second question about local forces. There was already a partnership --

Is there a problem with the sound?

MR. TURNER: Go ahead. Try again.

COL. DAVIS: Okay. Do I need to repeat any part of my statement -- my answer? I'm not sure exactly where I may have been cut off.

But, Jim, what I was saying was with respect to the concern about local forces, local Iraqi police forces and their recruitment and potential sectarian concerns or bias there, the MNC-I and MNF-I have established, you know, this year as the Year of the Police, along with my command, the Civil Police Assistance Training Team and the Multinational Security Transition Command, so that police transition teams would eventually be associated with every local station throughout Iraq.

In Baghdad, we're virtually there. And there are some still being stood up this year. But there's a large percentage -- well over two-thirds -- that already have an associated team that works with and touches those station police on a daily basis.

So that kind of contact with the U.S. and coalition partners is what will ensure that they have role models to follow, they get the appropriate training and that there's also oversight to ensure that kind of sectarian bias doesn't exist at the local stations.

MR. TURNER: Bob.

Q Colonel, this is Bob Burns again.

I think you said earlier that you have 9,000 police? What's the ultimate goal? And what's your time frame for reaching that point where you have all the authorized people and have them fully trained?

COL. DAVIS: Sure.

The authorized goal is just under 10,600. So you can see with 9,000, we're over the 80 percent mark, and we believe that certainly by early summer, we'll have our full manning.

In terms of authorized strength and equipping, probably by late summer/early fall, we'll have all the equipment that they're authorized.

In terms of operations, that really just restricts the length of operations, the scale of operations they can

do because they've been operating ever since they graduated, starting with the first course back in November 2004. Within weeks, they were operating in Fallujah, and successively, every single brigade, within weeks of graduating from the training course, was operating, conducting counterinsurgency operations or area security operations. So they've been working and contributing to the fight ever since they graduated from their respective courses.

Q Yeah, I had a follow-up.

So when you say by early fall they'll be all equipped as well as fully manned -- but how much longer beyond that will you need to work with them?

COL. DAVIS: Well, that's a good question because that's -- we consider that a conditions-based decision. That's a decision that's certainly above my pay grade. But it's something that we work for, and we're working every month to increase their capabilities. We want them to be obviously as proficient as they possibly can so that when we back out, they will handle the threat.

Right now they're very capable. They do great work. They're getting better every single month. We've seen that from -- when we started with them back in April of last year, they were doing company- sized operations, and then shortly thereafter, within months, they were conducting battalion- and even brigade-sized operations, and actually to date we've done a total of seven division-level either raids or security operations.

So we can see them growing in capability. And the more equipment they get, the more they'll be able to deploy their combat power and the more they'll be able to do.

There are still some significant logistics sustainment shortfalls, and that's what we're working to set in place, both with our higher headquarters in the ministry itself as well as training the specialists that they need within the national police to sustain themselves and to support themselves for long durations.

MR. TURNER: Pam.

Q It's Pam Hess again.

Could you be a little more specific in how the public order battalions are different from special police commandos like Wolf Brigade? How is their mission different?

COL. DAVIS: Okay.

In essence, there's more commonality than there is difference and distinction.

In terms of mission profile, they both do cordons and searches, raids, counterinsurgency operations. But, in fact, the commando brigades have been more often deployed for short-term deployments, but they have been given some recent assignments where they're staying for extensive periods of time in some of the failed cities. They're now becoming more and more stable just because they need national police to help bridge between the Iraqi army and eventually the Iraqi police taking over the civil security responsibility.

I would say there's a difference in uniform right now, but in mission profile, maybe one distinguishing mark might be that the Public Order have had assigned battlespace in Baghdad. But in the near future, there is an initiative to develop combined operating areas for the commandos to also have assigned battlespace in Baghdad.

So there's a bit of merging of missions and roles, but that's also the long-term intent -- is to merge the

special police, the national police commandos and Public Order into one professional national police force.

Q And just to be clear, the -- if I'm correct, the Public Order Battalions are in Baghdad securing Route Irish out to the airport?

COL. DAVIS: No, that's the 1st Mech Brigade, but if I could, Pam, let me capitalize on that for a second. There's a route that we call Route Pluto. It's a major road that runs along the east side of Baghdad in the Rusafa District, and then down south, southeast, which was a very dangerous route. A coalition lost upwards of 10 service members on that road to IEDs. I, myself, lost three men on that road, and the coalition came to us and asked if we could help in securing that road.

And in mid-December the 3rd Public Order Brigade began setting up checkpoints and patrolling that area, and since then, there has been no loss of life and no significant IED attack. So wherever we've seen the national police employed on a specific mission, we've seen significant success and improved security not only to the local civilians but to the coalition forces ourselves.

Q And that's the road to Salman Pak, is that right?

COL. DAVIS: That's correct. The road to -- that's the route to Salman Pak.

MR. TURNER: Jeff?

Q Colonel, Jeff Schogol with Stars and Stripes. I just want to get the numbers correct. You have about 9,000 police officers now. You need about 1,700 NCOs, and your authorized strength is 10,600. Does that mean you are now going to be recruiting exclusively NCOs? Are you going to be training within the ranks so far?

COL. DAVIS: Jeff, that's a good question. I've lobbied real hard to get as many NCO candidates as possible in the next training course, An Numiniyah, and I believe we're shooting for between 200 and 300. We'll know in just a few days when the class starts. It's in-processing. But we're also recruiting officers, so that particular class will have almost 50 percent leaders in the course, and that's going to help us I think tremendous in bringing up the percentage of NCOs and officers that we need for the division. But the rest of your numbers are correct, and we will also train some of our own, I would say, NCO candidates, those national police that have demonstrated that they've got the right character, the right skills and leadership capabilities in that special police academy that I talked about earlier.

Q Just as a quick follow-up, it appears you need about 100 more NCOs than your authorized strength. Does that mean you're going to be, as you said, looking for NCOs within the existing police force?

COL. DAVIS: Yes, that's correct. We're going to be looking for NCOs within the existing police force. We've got a little over in some brigades a year and close to a year-and-a-half worth of experience, and just like any army, you're going to try to grow some of your best junior enlisted -- in the case of the U.S. Army -- to take over those junior NCO leadership roles and then promoting some of your more capable junior NCOs to fill the senior NCO ranks. So we're applying very much the same -- a similar model that all armies apply to the national police.

Q It's Caroline Drees again from Reuters. I apologize. I have another numbers question because I'm still not quite sure I got it right. Were you saying earlier that you currently have a little over 150 NCOs, and that refers to the 9,000 figure? So of the 9,000 Public Order Police, only 150 are NCOs? And if that's correct, how does that work?

COL. DAVIS: That -- Carol, that's correct. There are only 150 -- I want to say 157, at last count, of

9,000 national police in general, and well, therein lies -- you know, what we would consider a problem in Western armies.

The lack of NCOs means that you've got to have a lot more officer supervision, and in many cases you're picking a special police who doesn't have the recognized rank, or pay to go with it, to step up to a leadership position. And there are similar problems throughout other Iraqi security forces, and we're addressing that by recruiting. But that's the -- frankly, that's pretty close to what the Iraqi army had before in the pre-Saddam regime. So they didn't have a large professional NCO force; they were more administrators, clerks, assistants, and just promoted in ranks versus actually trained as junior leaders.

Q Thank you.

MR. TURNER: Any more questions?

Q Luis Martinez of ABC News. Sir, you mentioned before that the Wolf Pack Commandos and your Special Police Battalions are going to be merging. Do you compare -- do you say that both forces right now are of equal training, equal capabilities? Or do you foresee official training for your troops or for their troops down the line?

COL. DAVIS: Well, I'm sorry, I didn't get your first name. But in terms of the merging and in capabilities and training, we see the merging as a very good idea. We want to professionalize this force. And we've continually characterized ourselves as more urban light infantry rather than the gendarmes or the carabinieri from, you know, the Italian and French models. And that's where we want to get to.

In terms of training capabilities, the training is slightly different in that the Public Order Police were a coalition partnership idea, and the commandos were a uniquely Iraqi idea. And with the commandos there wasn't initial training, so to speak, that was either supervised or supported by the coalition. But since the SPTTs have arrived, they've established quite a few training programs with the SPTTs, with some coalition support, and now at the special police academy to get a two-week basic skills course.

The Public Order, on the other hand, have had at least a six-week basic course which includes individual, staff and leader training, as well as some combined exercise up to the battalion and brigade level.

We see the merging as a very good thing.

MR. TURNER: I think we have time for one more short question.

Q Can I follow up on that?

MR. TURNER: Yeah, go ahead.

Q Since you see it as a good thing, is it a good thing for the Ministry of Interior forces, as opposed to your forces? Is that why it's a good thing, because you feel that your troops are better trained?

COL. DAVIS: Well, I didn't say I felt my troops were better trained, because I share many of the same frustrations as my brother commando SPTT commander. But we feel that they've got adequate training right now, we want to make them better, and that professionalizing the force will certainly make them better. We want to make them professional police, national police.

And so with the professionalization will come training on police skills so that they can, in fact, be national police like many of the national police we see in European countries. And that's kind of the role model we've

used. European countries developed national police during the years of counterterrorism, and those police are very, very effective. And they're a high-end police force that work well with local police and take care of issues that are organized crime or counterterrorism that's beyond the capabilities of their local police.

And that's the model that we're using with Iraq. We believe that there will be a threat that continues on in the future, and the national police will help fill that gap within the internal security of Iraq so that the Army doesn't have to be employed for civil security.

MR. TURNER: Okay, Colonel Davis. Thank you for visiting the Pentagon Briefing Room today, and we hope to see you here again soon.

COL. DAVIS: Okay, thank you. Do I have a chance to say some closing remarks?

MR. TURNER: Sure. Go right ahead.

COL. DAVIS: Well, first off, thank you for your questions today.

I'd just like to close by saying something about the common bonds between the Public Order National Police, the Iraqi security force brothers and sisters, and coalition forces. We are all serving our respective countries and the good people of Iraq for one common goal -- a free and secure Iraq with a government that's representative and accountable to its people. We're all volunteers and we're all patriot of our respective countries.

We're all making significant sacrifices to achieve our common goal. Iraqi and coalition member alike serves day in and day out away from his family. Iraqi and coalition member alike faces grave danger in carrying out his or her job. Family members of Iraqi security forces face risks that our families, thankfully, do not. Some have made the ultimate sacrifice to bring about this goal, to include four of my own men and over 110 Public Order policemen. In spite of these risks, the national police continue to fight and serve, and there's no end to men waiting to join the line.

It's a humbling experience to see what the national police are doing on behalf of the good people of Iraq, and it's a rewarding experience to contribute to their success and to be part of their continued growth and improvement. It's an honor to fight by their side.

The SPTTs have made a tremendous impact since their arrival. They're all combat veterans, many on their second and some on their third combat tour since 9/11. They're competent and courageous soldiers, sailors and Marines who provide expertise, an admirable role model to their Iraqi brethren. They're true American heroes whom you should be proud of and whom I'm honored to command.

Thank you for your time.

MR. TURNER: Thank you, Colonel Davis.

(C) COPYRIGHT 2005, FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC., 1000 VERMONT AVE. NW; 5TH FLOOR; WASHINGTON, DC - 20005, USA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. ANY REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION IS EXPRESSLY PROHIBITED. UNAUTHORIZED REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION CONSTITUTES A MISAPPROPRIATION UNDER APPLICABLE UNFAIR COMPETITION LAW, AND FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC. RESERVES THE RIGHT TO PURSUE ALL REMEDIES AVAILABLE TO IT IN RESPECT TO SUCH MISAPPROPRIATION. FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC. IS A PRIVATE FIRM AND IS NOT AFFILIATED WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. NO COPYRIGHT IS CLAIMED AS TO ANY PART OF THE ORIGINAL WORK PREPARED BY A UNITED STATES

GOVERNMENT OFFICER OR EMPLOYEE AS PART OF THAT PERSON'S OFFICIAL DUTIES. OR
INFORMATION ON SUBSCRIBING TO FNS, PLEASE CALL JACK GRAEME AT 202-347-1400.

<http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2006/tr20060217-12529.html>