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## News Transcript

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**Presenter: Deputy Director for Regional Operations, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Brig. Gen. Carter Ham**

**May 31,  
2006**

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### DoD News Briefing with Brig. Gen. Ham

GEN. HAM: Hi. Good afternoon.

The past several days have highlighted the complexity of operations in which U.S. military forces are engaged in throughout the world.

In Iraq, there are approximately 130,000 U.S. military personnel conducting operations, assisting and advising Iraqi security force units, and helping the Iraqi government establish the rule of law and extend fundamental government services throughout the country.

Recently about 1,500 soldiers of the Army's 2nd Brigade, 1st Armored Division, deployed from Kuwait into western Iraq to conduct operations. This is precisely why this force has been stationed in Kuwait -- to provide General Casey and General Chiarelli with a flexible force that could be employed when the tactical situations so dictate.

In Afghanistan, the protests by local Afghan citizens following a tragic accident involving a U.S. military vehicle were well-covered by numerous agencies. The real news, it seems to me, is how the Afghan government responded to this situation. It's important to note that it was Afghan, not U.S., security forces who established control, and the sovereign Afghan government implemented policies and made public addresses to cope with the situation.

Certainly we are all deeply remorseful that an accident in which a U.S. vehicle was involved resulted in loss of life and injuries, and an appropriate investigation is under way.

Moreover, we should be cognizant of the fact that the freely elected government of Afghanistan managed this situation effectively. That could not have happened only a few short years ago.

There are two incidents in the Pacific that have also required U.S. military forces.

The unrest in East Timor has continued, with the tactical situation changing rather fluidly. Most U.S. citizens have departed, though the U.S. embassy remains in operation. The Australian Army and Navy, as well as others, are on the scene and are working closely with officials in East Timor to help restore order.

The U.S. military role has been to ensure the security of our embassy and assist the Australians as they may request.

And in Indonesia another natural disaster has caused large-scale loss of life and damage. In response to the request from the government of Indonesia, the United States has offered medical support, financial contributions and some technical advice and assistance. We'll work closely with the government of Indonesia as recovery and rebuilding operations continue. And it's worth noting that the Indonesian government is also watching very closely for indications that Mount Merapi may erupt. Mount Merapi, I think, as most of you know, is a volcano only a short distance from the area affected by the recent earthquake.

Finally, I'd simply say to those who have lost family members and friends in Iraq and Afghanistan that our hearts and our prayers are with you. Several other nations have lost service members recently, and their loss is just as great. And it's right here, in this forum, to acknowledge the loss of Paul Douglas and James Brolan of CBS News. Many of you knew them, served alongside them in Iraq and other places, and you know what dedicated professionals they were. And all of us here pray for the full recovery of all who have suffered wounds, including Kimberly Dozier.

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

Q General Ham, I'd like to ask a couple of questions about the Ramadi situation in light of yesterday's announcement on sending additional -- two additional battalions to that area. Are those going as rotation forces to replace some of the unit, or are they reinforcing the existing forces there? And also, why now, given your statement last week, for example, that Ramadi's problem is really a problem for the Iraqis to resolve, not the American forces there?

GEN. HAM: I think I said last week that Ramadi is contentious, probably the most contentious city in Iraq, and I think that that's true. There's great concern there right now. There are units -- U.S. Army units that are in that area that are approaching the end of their normal deployment time. So it's appropriate that there be some forces to relieve them so that they make that redeployment on time.

The commander --

Q (Off mike) --

GEN. HAM: I'm sorry?

Q (Off mike) -- physically for one replacement?

GEN. HAM: I think I'd just leave it at as replacement. It may -- sometimes there's a little bit more, sometimes a little bit less depending on the structure of the unit that is replacing the one that's currently there.

But having said that, there is -- there is a contest in Ramadi right now, and that is a contest for the Iraqi government to figure out how to deal with. And our job is to help them do that. Those discussions are ongoing. Those -- you know, plans are being considered and how to do that.

We talked last week, I think, about the need and the desire of the commanders to have Iraqi security forces operating in and around Ramadi, and those plans are under way as well. So the U.S. military has a role, to be sure, and the Iraqi security forces and the Iraqi government have the larger role.

I think the -- you all have seen some reports. There have been people who have said that the city or parts of the city are under control by the insurgents or by terrorists or foreign fighters and the like. That's not a

situation that can be tolerated. The Iraqi government's not going to tolerate it. And we'll do our part to help them restore the rule of law and restore order to Ramadi.

Q Do you share that assessment? I'm sorry, just one last question. Do you share that assessment that in fact parts or all of the city are under control of the insurgents?

GEN. HAM: I think I would stand by the word "contentious." I mean, there's an advantage -- there's an informational advantage for terrorists, for insurgents, for foreign fighters to make a claim that, hey, we control an area, and that gains some traction sometimes. What is clear is that those who are opposed to the legitimate Iraqi government in and around Ramadi have conducted a number of assassinations, intimidation efforts continue, and again, that's our role, is to help the Iraqis restore the rule of law and to restore the role of the legitimate government of Iraq in that city.

Q Sir, just to follow up on Bob's question, with you noting the contentious nature of the city right now and the claims of who supports -- who controls parts of the city, do you think that Ramadi might require an offensive similar to the one in Fallujah in November 2004 to make sure that it's not a breeding ground for the insurgency or a hiding place for the insurgency?

GEN. HAM: I don't know. And it's not fair from here in the Pentagon to make those kinds of assessments. Those are assessments that are appropriately made by the commanders on the scene and, most importantly, made by commanders on the scene in collaboration and in consultation with the Iraqi security force leaders and with the government of Iraq to decide what is the best way for the Iraqis to reassert and to maintain control in the city.

Yes?

Q The report that -- and the death certificate of the victims of Haditha say that these people were killed -- (inaudible) -- and not -- they didn't -- they weren't killed because of an explosion, but by bullets in their head. First, what's your comment on it? And then, how do you think that this will affect the relationship between the American Army in Iraq and the people?

GEN. HAM: The first part of your question, I think, is clear. There are, as most of you know, two investigations under way. It would be inappropriate from here to talk about what may or may not come from those investigations. But as those investigations conclude and commanders make the decisions based on the information that is derived from those investigations, that as that information is available and appropriate, we'll certainly make that available to you.

The second part of your question is, I think, a very important one, and that is, just simply the allegation that the U.S. military personnel may have acted improperly, it does have an effect. There's no question about it. That's why this investigation is so important -- to find out what are the facts. The allegations are out there, and those are widely known. The facts are not yet known, and it's important for us to know what those facts are.

As the coalition forces operate inside Iraq, we need the consent of the Iraqi government in order to operate in the manner in which we would like to operate, which is in support of them. Allegations such as this, regardless of how they are born out by the facts, can have an effect on the ability of U.S. forces to continue to operate. So it is one we take quite seriously.

Q General Ham, a follow-up to that. How operationally -- how much more operationally difficult, though, does it potentially make coalition operations in Iraq if this does deteriorate Iraqi confidence in the U.S. military, because I know you and others have pointed out from this podium how important it is the cooperation of civilians -- tips about IEDs, help from civilians; it really does make an impact. And if that is eroded by this, how

can this affect support --

GEN. HAM: It can have a negative effect, and that's why it is so very, very important to get the facts right and -- so that we know what is going on.

We do rely very heavily -- and more importantly, the Iraqi security forces rely heavily -- on the support from the Iraqi people. And anything that tends to diminish that obviously is not helpful to what we're trying to do.

Yes?

Q General, the capture of this terrorist -- the short name is Ahmad Al-Dabbash (sp). Can you talk about the significance of his capture and the overall impact it may have on al Qaeda in Iraq or other terror operations?

GEN. HAM: Well, any time there is a capture of someone who's operating against the Iraqi people and against the Iraqi government, that's good news.

In this particular instance, I would say this individual is probably not a national-level leader, but nonetheless one of some importance. There are indications -- very clear indications that he was involved in the spring '04 IED attacks, bombings in Karbala, which, as most of you will recall, were targeting against the -- or targeting the Iraqi people more than anything else.

So his detention is in fact a very, very good thing for all involved. And I think, again, in an operation -- joint combined operation between the U.S. and Iraqi forces conveys how much the Iraqi forces have progressed over the past few years.

Q If I may follow, do you think anything you gain from capturing him could lead you closer to Zarqawi? Do you have that hope?

GEN. HAM: Well, I don't know to -- particularly to Zarqawi, but any time an individual is detained and is questioned, we are always seeking information that may lead someplace else, perhaps to another cell, perhaps to other individuals. All of that information is very useful to us and to the Iraqis, who are keenly involved in this as well.

Pam?

Q To tie up a couple of things, on Hadithah, what exactly will be released publicly? And do you have any sense of when that's going to happen?

GEN. HAM: I don't know --

Q Investigation reports.

GEN. HAM: I don't know what exactly will be released. When the investigation is complete, the -- and the commanders have assessed that and the -- all the information that is appropriate to be released will be made available. But I do not have a good sense of timeline.

Q On the call -- I'm sorry. A couple things. On the call- forward force, is there anybody -- any unit going to rotate into Kuwait to backfill that force, or are they leaving all -- words are escaping me. (Laughter.) You understand what I think. Anybody rotating into Kuwait?

GEN. HAM: Well, we wouldn't talk about future troop movements. But the important thing is that the commanders retain the ability to have a reserve force that they can commit for unforeseen circumstances. And that's certainly ---

Q (Off mike) -- right?

GEN. HAM: Well, they clearly do have that, that capability, and will continue to have that capability.

Q But not resident in Kuwait anymore, because that unit has been completely deployed, right?

GEN. HAM: I think I would just leave it that the commander will always have a reserve force able to deal with unforeseen tactical situations. And that's -- that was the case yesterday. It is the case today.

Yes.

Q The battalion that's from the call-forward force that's in Baghdad, will that go to Ramadi? And will the National Guard unit -- the Pennsylvania National Guard unit in Ramadi -- which I believe is due to rotate home soon -- will that be extended to deal with the Ramadi situation?

GEN. HAM: We'd obviously prefer to not extend forces, and I'm not aware of any initiative to do that. So we'd like units to come home on time, and we'll make every effort to make sure that that happens in this case.

With regard to the 1st Battalion from the Kuwait-based brigade that went into Baghdad, the -- again, General Chiarelli and General Casey will make decisions based on not just those forces, but all the forces and where is there a(n) appropriate place for them to be at the appropriate time based on the tactical situation.

One of the great hallmarks of the U.S. military is the ability to operate very flexibly around the country. And again, those of you who have been watching us for a number of years know that it is not at all uncommon for units from one part of the country to move to another for a period of time to conduct operations, focused operations anywhere in the country and then go someplace else. So I would certainly not rule out that kind of flexibility. We want our commanders to have that type of tactical flexibility.

Q Let me go back to Ramadi again. I just want to get a reality check there. To what extent are -- how long are you going to give -- or work with the Iraqi forces for -- to give them a chance to kind of settle Ramadi down before you have to maybe take it back into U.S. hands again? I mean, there have been numerous small operations around Ramadi to try to clear neighborhoods and -- can you just give us a sense of -- obviously without giving any plans away, but what the overall idea is for Ramadi?

GEN. HAM: Well, there's one thing I know, and that is that Ramadi will not be under U.S. control. It is and will always be under Iraqi control.

There's contention right now, and there's a contest there, and that's got to be resolved and it's got to be resolved by the Iraqis, and we'll do all we can to help.

It will be the Iraqis who have to make a determination as to what the best way is to establish the legitimate local and provincial governments there, and I'm confident that our commanders will help them do that. But we shouldn't any longer, in the sovereign country of Iraq, have a notion that the U.S. is going to exert control over any particular area. It's Iraq. It's their country. Our job is to help them.

Q If I could follow up. If they don't seem to be able to pull it together, though, is there an idea that the

U.S. will really have to take the lead? And it's clearly a town that's been spiraling out of control for some time. It's kind of a key town for that part of the country. It's clearly setting progress in that part of the country way back. Is there at any point a point where you have to say, okay, we have to do something, i.e., Fallujah or some other plan?

GEN. HAM: I'd take exception with your characterization of spiraling out of control. I'd stand by my assertion that it's contentious; that there are clearly areas in which it is tough for the legitimate leaders in that city to operate and we've got to help them regain that ability to do so. But again I would just reiterate, this is the sovereign nation of Iraq. Transfer of sovereignty has occurred now almost two years ago, and it will be the Iraqis who decide.

The demonstrated ability of the Iraqi security forces, particularly over the past several months, doesn't leave me with any question about their ability to operate effectively once it is that their government decides what the plan will be. We'll help them. They need our help, and we'll do that. But I'm confident they're up to the task.

Okay, maybe two more. Pam and then -- (off mike).

Q The report for Congress yesterday on Iraq had a number of charts in it, and there was one that was interesting and puzzling. And I'm wondering if, given your time in Iraq in the north, you could comment on it.

There was a poll question that was issued, and it said, which of these groups do you have the greatest confidence to move Iraq in a positive direction. And in Mosul, sort of uniquely in the country, 70 percent said the insurgent forces.

Can you explain that? What is it about Mosul and that place that they seem to have so much popular support?

GEN. HAM: I didn't see that particular aspect of the report, and it's been a year plus that I've -- since I've been there. But it is important to note that, I think, as you know, that Mosul, though it is an ethnically diverse city, there is a very strong Sunni Arab presence there. There's a very, very strong former military presence in the city, and that may have some aspect of it.

I would also note that about a month or maybe a month and a half ago the -- there was a delegation from the provincial council that was here, that met with members of OSD and met with the deputy secretary of Defense and had some pretty positive reports. Again, the composition of that province council, ethnically diverse as the area is, but I think that's -- that may be -- that strong army presence, you know, may be part of it.

Last question, please.

Q Obviously, there -- the Haditha reports have not come out. There is no conclusion. But can you tell me some of the things that the military is doing in Iraq to reinforce the soldiers and Marines of rules of engagement or the law of land warfare? Or what sort of things are you telling the Iraqi government to sort of prevent incidents like this from happening again?

GEN. HAM: Well, our preparatory training for units that are in -- and individuals who are headed to Iraq or Afghanistan addresses in a very comprehensive and repetitive manner the appropriate response using -- to threats and the appropriate application of the rules of engagement.

And while we don't talk publicly about that, that's a very, very integral part of both the individual and unit collective training that occurs. That training doesn't stop when units and individuals are deployed. There are programs to ensure that there is refresher training conducted from the lowest level up to the highest level so that

we are all reminded of the proper application of the rules of engagement, the proper application of the laws of land warfare to ensure that our personnel operate consistent with that.

Q Do you still have faith in that training, given what apparently happened in Haditha? Do you think that this may signal that more is needed or something different is needed?

GEN. HAM: No. I have absolute confidence that the training is effective. Again, the investigation will bear out some facts. We don't know what those are yet. And as we do with all of our investigations, we always learn from them. Whether something inappropriate happened or not, we have this tradition of doing after-action reviews of all of our operations and all of these types of incidents that we talk about frequently in here. There is a very critical review that occurs, from the lowest tactical level on up, to ensure that we learn from that and become better and more effective each and every day that we're operating.

Thanks. I think we'll end it there. Thank you very much.

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