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Presenter: Commander, Multinational Security Transition Command-Iraq, Lt. Gen. Martin Dempsey

**June 27,
2006**

DoD News Briefing with Lt. Gen. Dempsey from the Pentagon

STAFF: Good afternoon, and welcome. It's my pleasure to introduce somebody that I don't think needs much of an introduction. But we have Lieutenant General Martin Dempsey, who's the commander of the Multinational Security Transition Command in Iraq. General Dempsey and his command are responsible for assisting the Iraqi government in developing and organizing, training, equipping and sustaining the Iraqi security forces.

He has spoken to you, I think, last in the March time frame. Prior to this assignment, he was the commanding general of the 1st Armored Division, and spent from July of '03 to October '04 in Iraq, and has a tremendous amount of experience, and a very important position right now. And he was in Washington and offered to give us a little bit of time this afternoon.

So, General, thank you very much, and let me turn it over to you.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Thank you.

I'm tempted to begin by saying, "So this is what you all look like." (Laughter.) As you know, normally I'm on the other end and I hear the voice, but never do see the face.

So I have a -- just a very short introductory remark, and that is the generation of Iraqi soldiers, policemen and small units is moving apace. It's on track with the campaign plan that has been in place for some time. And we fully anticipate that we will achieve the desired end state numbers by the end of calendar year '06.

The systems, processes, institutions, though, that bind together something into an enterprise that we could call a defense establishment, both in the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Defense, is where we are placing the greatest amount of our effort now, in particular since the formation of government and the announcement of the two new security ministries just about two weeks ago.

So, since our time together is fairly short, I would be happy to make that my opening statement and start with questions.

Q General, how many U.S. troops are involved in training the Iraqi security forces, and is that going to be increasing? And also, can you answer how many Iraqi battalions are capable of operating and sustaining

themselves independently of U.S. forces?

GEN. DEMPSEY: On the first question of the number of soldiers involved in training Iraqi security forces, this enterprise of ours is really a three-legged stool -- some of you have heard me use that metaphor before -- in this sense: there's a training base, there's MTT teams -- Military Transition Teams; and then there's partner units.

And without any one of those legs, it becomes an unstable platform.

And so when we talk about how many people are actually dedicated to training Iraqi soldiers, my honest answer to you is everybody in Iraq right now, at some level, is involved in trying to help Iraq become more capable of their own operations. The actual number of MTT team personnel is probably in the vicinity of 4,000 or so, that's both on borders in the police -- local police stations, national police and military. But truly this is an endeavor where everyone contributes to that end state goal.

I don't talk about independent or self-reliant or autonomous yet in the development of Iraqi security forces for two reasons. Number one, that assessment is generally done by Lieutenant General Pete Chiarelli as he partners with them because he's got the best visibility on how they're actually performing.

Secondly, until they have these institutions and these institutional processes in place that I just spoke to you about, personnel management, life support contracting, distribution of fuel, provision of supplies and ammunition, then it'll be some time before they're absolutely independent. Certain parts of the country, though, are stable enough to where those systems are actually moving ahead of other parts of the country, notably Al Anbar province, which is the most contested area and where everything is just harder because it's so contested.

Q Can I just follow up on the 4,000? Do you see that number as increasing in the coming months?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, generally speaking, we don't see it changing dramatically because as certain parts of the enterprise become capable, we'll shift the resources around. And so I wouldn't say a dramatic increase in that number. Although we'll do what we have to do to get the Iraqi security forces capable.

Ma'am?

Q I'm Pam Hess with UPI. How many -- I'm sorry, in your planning document, when do you -- have you projected when those internal processes are going to come on line in the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Interior, as far as --

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah. Actually, I'm glad you asked that question so I could follow up and say most of the systems and processes are in place right now. I mean, there is a pay system, there is a promotion system, there is a personnel accountability system, there is a contracting system -- and I could go on and on. In any ministry-level endeavor, there's probably 18-or-so processes that have to be functioning in order for the institution to be supportive of what's in the field. All those systems are in place today, but they're immature; I mean, they haven't been at it for that long. And so it comes down to taking them through cycles of things, so cycles of pay, cycles of promotions, cycles of procurement, budgeting cycles. And so some of them will come on board faster than others.

I mean, for example, if we were having this conversation 18 months ago, there were still U.S. personnel helping Iraq figure out how to pay its soldiers and policemen. That entire process has been transitioned over to Iraqis. We have no part in their pay process right now.

Life support -- just four or five months ago, we were providing a proportion -- a percentage of their life

support, and today we provide none of their life support. We assist them in extremis if something they've put in place fails -- like a food service contract or a fuel distribution problem. But life support has been transitioned over to the Iraqi Ministry of Defense. MOI is lagging by about 90 days.

So it will -- Pam, it will come on board by process over time. But we think we'll need to be closely partnering with the ministries for at least two years.

Yeah?

Q General, how would you describe the current capabilities of Iraqi police forces? And what kind of progress is being made in clearing out the corruption, the tribal -- the insurgent influence in some of the local police departments?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah. Well, as you know, Nick, local police is the biggest challenge we have in terms of local influences. And so, of the 135,000-or-so local police -- that's what we're building toward, and we're probably 82, 83 percent there now. Of the 135,000 local police, the areas of greatest risk for the things you discuss, which is local influences, corruption, influence of extra-governmental groups, I mean clearly, Baghdad, Al Anbar province, Diyala province, and lately Basra, to some extent. The rest of the country, though, the local police are actually performing quite well.

And so what we're doing with the new minister -- the new minister, by the way, Minister Bolani, Minister of Interior Bolani has come on board, he's completely aware of the challenge he has with public confidence in his security forces, and very eager to work with us to help him move past that.

So I haven't spent enough time with him yet to tell you what his plan is, but it will be very much his plan enabled through us.

Q Yes. General, Barry McCaffrey recently got back from Iraq, and he talked about the training effort for Iraqi forces, and he said the Iraqi units were real, growing and willing to fight. But he also said they are, quote, "Very badly equipped with only a few light vehicles, small arms, and they lack decent communication here." Would you agree with that assessment? And what should be done about it? Is this something the Iraqis have to do on their own? Will the U.S. help them? Give us your sense of that.

GEN. DEMPSEY: As you might expect, I was asked a few questions about that from the time it occurred, and even now we were asked about that, not only by our own government, but also by the Iraqi government. I mean, they're interested in knowing what we think we can help them do and what they need to plan to do on their own.

I don't agree with the characterization entirely. They are lightly, but not poorly, equipped. They've been equipped adequate to the task of fighting an internal security challenge. They are equipped with durable weapons and affordable weapons, and that's not affordable by us, but at some point affordable by them, and also equipped with weapons that they are familiar with from their former training. Because as you know, about 60 percent of the army has had some prior military experience, and so it made sense then and it makes sense now that as we build them that they would be issued weapons with which they are familiar, in addition to take advantage of other things like stockpiles of ammunition that we're capturing.

Now that said, we're working with the new government -- both ministries -- on a five-year modernization plan, and that five-year modernization plan will cause the Iraqi government to make some decisions about what kind of capabilities they will want and need in the future, not only for internal security but for external security.

So just an illustrious example. By the time we get to about September, the Iraqi army will be issued 60

millimeter lightweight mortars, which is a very fitting weapon for a counterinsurgency fight. They will not be issued 155 millimeter artillery because that's something that is necessary for external security but not for counterinsurgency.

We will over time, and for the most part, our equipping strategy culminates -- not culminates but achieves its purpose by the end of the calendar year.

There are certain things -- some HMMWVs, for example -- they will eventually end up with 2,797 up-armored HMMWVs, distributed according to a -- yeah, 2,797 -- distributed against the table of organization equipment where it makes sense, not to cocoon every Iraqi soldier in a HMMWV, but rather to give them some convoy protection and route clearance capability and so forth.

The point is, their counterinsurgency capability will be adequate, for the most part, by the end of this year. But they have to make some decisions, in consultation with us, about their five-year modernization plan.

Q Is that -- was that plan -- what's the cost estimate on that? How much will be --

GEN. DEMPSEY: On the modernization plan?

Q How much will be paid for by the Iraqis, how much by the --

GEN. DEMPSEY: Oh, I don't know the answer to that. But it is one of the factors. I mean, we -- they have to decide how big should their army be. And we've been working with them on programmatics, and based on how big it'll be, then they'll know how much of it will be consumed by pay and life support, operations and maintenance, sustainment activities. And then they'll decide what priorities they have for modernization, whether it's overhead ISR -- don't forget there's an air force and a navy to be considered; they're small and effective, but they need to be modernized -- what kind of artillery, what kind of air defense, potentially.

And so all of that will be put forward to the new government of Iraq by a team, incidentally, composed of my planners and Iraqi planners. And then those priorities will go forward into a process that they call the defense management review, which is pretty much the same thing we call it.

Q But as far as how much the U.S. will either give them equipment or money toward this, do we have any sense of that, ballpark --

GEN. DEMPSEY: I'm sure that somebody will have a sense of that, but -- and in fact I will be part of the discussions and make my own recommendation. But it's very premature.

Q Ballpark -- billions, tens of billions? I mean --

GEN. DEMPSEY: Ballpark -- I'd say East Coast, not Camden Yards, and -- but I don't know yet what -- where we're headed with that.

Yeah?

Q Can I get back to the issue of independent battalions? Last week Carl Levin, senior Democrat of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said no more -- he said that zero to one -- the most recent report to Congress -- zero to one battalions in Iraq are independent. Now, how is it that three -- after three years of the American enterprise there, six months into the year of transition, year of police or year of training, we're only at that level?

That's one question.

And secondly, you talked about year-end goals. What is your year-end goal for independent battalions? How many?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah, I thought I was as clear as I could be in the prior question about use of word "independent." It's just not appropriate yet to be thinking in terms of "independent" anything in Iraq. This remember is a nation at war, and although they have taken responsibility for battlespace and large swaths of it -- they have taken responsibility for processes at the national level -- they are not independent at this point in time. And they will become independent as we see the new government take on some of the issues related to things like national reconciliation, which has the potential to reduce the threat, which then could over time allow them to become more independent in terms of military operations.

This is a very much -- when we talk about Iraqi security, our term for it is DIME; there's diplomatic issues, information issues, military issues and economic issues that are inextricably interwoven, and I'm not dodging the question. But it's premature for me to talk about when I think Iraqi military units may become independent.

Q Let me ask you another way. Last September, General Casey said, if a year from then -- in other words, this September there were ones, twos battalions that were independent, he would be worried come this September. Is he going to be worried this September? Are you going to have more than ones, twosies?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, you'd have to ask General Casey if he's going to be worried. I would be worried if I didn't see the progress I've seen moving toward independence. This is a work in progress, and I think for anyone to characterize it as anything other than that wouldn't be accurate.

Yeah?

Q As an indicator of progress, can you tell us, in March when you were here you said the border would be completely controlled by the Iraqis by July -- 3,600-kilometer border. Can you update us on that? Is that going to be true? And what does that mean?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah, I hope I didn't say Iraq -- control of its borders because that's a stretch. It's responsible for its borders. We've 254 of 258 border forts completed; 25,000 of 28,000 border police trained and equipped -- they'll be trained and equipped by the end of July -- 6,000 customs police. So they will have responsibility for 3,161 kilometers of Iraq's borders, as I discussed with you, by the end of June, early July. However, it's a tiered approach that the Iraqi government has chosen to take, I think, correctly, which is to say, border police on the perimeter backed up by Iraqi army, backed up by the coalition.

The border ports of entry are in -- a separate but important issue to mention in this context, though.

There's 14 ground ports of entry, and they are manned, generally, by about seven different ministries. And this government, the new government, has to, and intends to, get serious about putting in policies and practices at the legal border crossings to make sure that those aren't points of ingress for, you know, illegal contraband and things like that.

So the borders will be under Iraqi responsibility, as I discussed with you. That doesn't mean that they're going to be anywhere near under control. And I think the Iraqi government would admit that. That's going to take some time.

Yeah?

Q General, can you talk about the militias and how much activity there's been in terms of members of the various militias becoming part of the Iraqi security forces? How much of that have we seen, and how much are we going to see?

GEN. DEMPSEY: (Chuckles.) You just asked me to write my Master's thesis here in the next two minutes! Because that is the next big issue for not only Iraq, but for us, those of us that are in the business of training Iraqi security forces.

First step, national reconciliation. There has to be some -- and the Iraqi government knows this. You've heard Prime Minister Maliki's 24-point plan for national reconciliation. That will be the precursor to, potentially and hopefully, a reduction in the insurgency and a corresponding willingness on the part of the militias to disband, disarm, and integrate.

So what I'm preparing to do is provide advice to the Iraqi government, as their adviser on military training, on how we could -- or they could integrate militias and insurgents, and for that matter, security detainees, potentially, who have been released, through a reintegration program using some of the training areas that we've built. We've provided the Iraqi government with about 30 training centers, academies, institutes, colleges, across the country. And we can offer to the Iraqi government the option of transforming a handful of those into reintegration centers. Now, that's the future. Let me talk about the present.

As I said to you before, if a militiaman puts his rifle down, comes to a recruiting station, doesn't have a criminal record, raises his right hand and agrees to sign on the dotted line, passes the physical, and comes into the military, there's absolutely no way for me to know that -- or anyone else to know that. So where we try to mitigate the risk of militia influence is through a very careful selection and scrutiny of the leaders of these units, be they police chiefs, national police battalion commanders, army battalion commanders.

For the most part, I think we've been -- and the Iraqi government has been very successful at that. But there are documented cases of, as you well know, of militia influence in the legitimate security forces.

The new government and Prime Minister Maliki in particular has agreed that that will be one of his first priorities, and we'll be there to support him.

STAFF: Yeah.

Q Lisa Burgess with Stars and Stripes. Talking about Al Anbar province and the difficulties that we have there, two weeks ago we had a U.S. Marine adviser to one of the Iraqi divisions saying that we can't make progress here until we stop hemorrhaging personnel, talking about entire divisions that are losing up to half of their enlistees from payroll problems, problems with even getting fed on time. Can you talk about that a little bit, since it is such a rough area?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Sure. I can absolutely talk about it.

We -- that's the purpose of this thing called the transitional readiness assessment, and it's why it's a great interest to MNSTC-I because it allows us to see where units are losing personnel based on reported strengths. And then we drill into why, and then we engage with our Iraqi counterparts to work to get it fixed.

Hemorrhaging was clearly an exaggeration, and when you say divisions, plural, it's also an exaggeration. The attrition rate in the Iraqi army is higher than we'd like it to be, but it's by no means a hemorrhage. Now, there are parts of the country -- again, back to this issue of most contested areas, and Al Anbar being at the top of list, generally -- where as you might expect or should expect that the provision of pay -- which is a manual system, remember; they still pay manually, which means you drag, you know, a trunkload of

money out to make payment -- and where local contractors who are providing food could be intimidated or just a distance of the supply line could be intimidated, that it causes us challenges.

What we do in those cases is we address the challenges. And so in that particular example, when the report reached us, we took a specific OPT -- operational process team -- and we sent it out there with a one-star -- turned out to be a one-star Danish admiral, of all things, but who was a bulldog for me -- and we found a way to make sure that we had linkages for supply convoys. We had the Iraqi air force -- we got them into the business of flying supplies out into Western Al Anbar, and we go to work to try to fix the problems.

Those problems crop up from time to time throughout the country, but most notably they pop up in the heavily contested areas. So I wouldn't disagree that we had a problem in western Al Anbar province. I would also predict we'll probably have future problems in the most extreme regions and most heavily contested areas. But the important thing is that our Iraqi counterparts are beginning to be the ones who work to fix these problems. I mean, I sent my Danish one-star out there, but he took with him a team of five or six Iraqis, and they began to fix those problems.

Q General, I wanted to return to the question of the Shi'a militias, if I could. Do you have a sense how many men in arms there are in the Shi'a areas loyal to their clerics, not the central government? And when you were commander of 1st Armored, you spent quite a bit of time dealing with Muqtada al Sadr through a variety of military means. Is the answer today dealing with the clerical leaders from the top down, or dismembering these groups from the bottom up?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Let me start at the back end of the question then ask you to repeat the first, because I -- the back end of the question, in terms of how to deal with militias, I think the immediate issue -- or among the immediate issues is that they've got to stop brandishing weapons and trying to move with weapons. In other words, the only legitimate source of power, authority and weaponry in the government can be the legitimate security forces. And I think they're prepared to make that statement and enforce it. And as they make that statement and call for its enforcement, I fully expect the legitimate security forces to enforce the requirement.

But it does seem to me that there is a bit of -- as you described it -- bottom down -- I mean, I'm sorry -- top down and bottom up. Because I think this issue of national reconciliation has to be -- has to progress before you make that move against militias, because until the militias are convinced that the legitimate government is acting on their behalf, there's very little incentive for them to disband and demobilize.

So I absolutely agree with your characterization that this is something that has to happen from both ends -- the top, political mandate, as well as the call for and enforcement; and I also can absolutely assure you that the government of Iraq, the new government of Iraq, understands that and will not do anything precipitous until, you know, the proper measures are in place to make sure it works, because the last thing you want to do is confront them without any policy with which to deal with them, once you've confronted them.

Now, what was the first part?

Q Just a straight question of numbers, what's the --

GEN. DEMPSEY: As you know, CPA Order Number 9, from my first tour there, called for the nine -- they called them at the time, I think, "recognized" militias to come forward and declare their numbers, so that as they were integrated, they couldn't keep changing the number.

I don't have those numbers committed to memory. But, for example, in the Badr Corps it was 15,000 or 16,000. I think in total -- again, this is rough order of magnitude, the nine that were identified in the CPA Order Number 9 days was something between 60,000 and 70,000. Jaish al-Mahdi is a different issue. They're, as you

know, not covered by CPA Order Number 9. And their numbers are unknown to me; they may be known to others, but unknown to me.

Yes?

Q I would like to ask about out in Muthanna province. And according to chart, as of May this year in that province, the Iraqi army wasn't taking the lead or not even a partial lead. And then, now, a couple of days ago, the Iraqi government themselves announced that they are taking full security responsibility there.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Right.

Q And then I'm just wondering how is it possible this type of rapid progress is happening in -- within two months, or it's just a -- this is a typo of this --

GEN. DEMPSEY: No, it's not a typo at all. And it's a good question.

The movement from coalition control to Iraqi army lead to provincial Iraqi control, which is really accomplished by police forces, under the control of the governor, doesn't have to happen sequentially. You can skip a step. If the province is stable enough, the police force is capable enough, the governor confident enough and the coalition's assessment positive enough, then you can go from the coalition being in control of it all the way to provincial Iraqi control, without passing through Iraqi army lead. They don't have to be sequential, and that's what happened in Muthanna province.

I'm sorry. Pam?

Q Sure.

GEN. DEMPSEY: You've already had one. (Laughter.)

I'll come to you.

Q Okay.

Q General, you have one of the most important pieces of the calculation that General Casey will be making -- the confidence of the Iraqi security forces, strength of the insurgency, economic-political developments, et cetera. What's your assessment of what the state of the Iraqi military and police forces will be -- say, pick two benchmarks -- by the end of this year, end of next year? Will they hold up their end of that calculation? And if so, leading to how much of a reduction of U.S. and other foreign troops?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah. I won't comment on the outcome of what I'm doing in terms of reduction. That's clearly General Casey and General Chiarelli, meaning, you know, if I'd say the Iraqi army's built, and they say, "That's great, but we're not going anywhere," that's fine. It's fine with me. I've done my job, which is to build it and to provide advice on its capability and its ability to self-sustain.

So to your question about benchmarks, the Iraqi army will be built by the end of this calendar year. All of the pieces and parts and processes will be in place by the end of calendar year '06. It will have barracks. It will have training areas. It will have recruiting centers. And some of that will be self-sustaining, meaning thoroughly transitioned over to Iraqi control.

So Iraq -- Iraqis, at the end of calendar year '06, will be fully capable of recruiting, vetting, inducting, training, forming into units, putting them in barracks, sending them out the gate to perform their missions.

How they do when they go out the gate is the piece of this that Pete Chiarelli assesses, and his assessment will determine, to the greater extent, the answer to your question about drawdown.

Now, at the other end of it -- interestingly, I've actually got sort of both ends.

It's a set of bookends. I've got the basic training level -- entry level of it and the building of the training and equipping. And then, I pick it back up at the two ministries and the higher headquarters to make sure that the systems and processes are not only in place because I've told you they are in place, but are functioning to the extent necessary to support everything that falls between.

Q When you say it'll be built by the end of the year, I assume that means in that immature state as you mentioned earlier.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Absolutely. Correct.

Q So if it's built but immature at the end of this year, how close to maturity can it be by the end of next year say?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, the performance of the Iraqi units in the field, given what they're facing, has actually been quite remarkable in my view. I mean, this is an army that's being built while in contact with the enemy and has been in some horrific fights, has taken some significant casualties and has demonstrated a certain courage and resilience that, frankly, having been in the region for four or five years I was very encouraged to see. So I think given -- if you were a weightlifter, I'd say, how many repetitions is it going to take you at 120 pounds before you're going to be able to lift 150? If you can answer that question, I'll tell you how long it's going to take the army to be ready to go.

Ma'am?

STAFF: One more.

Q Kathleen Koch with CNN. You're talking about building the Iraqi army. You have mentioned some of the problems that you've faced with attrition, with equipment. Right now, today, what would you say is the greatest challenge you face, the greatest hurdle in getting them where they need to be?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah, that's a great question. I think that's -- you know, if you wonder what I think about, as my day ends, it's exactly that. I think it's probably fair to say leader development, and I say that because I've been to countless graduations of police academy cadets and military academy, young officers and basic training groups. And universally -- and some of you have been to some of these things with me -- universally these young men come out of a training base at a very high level of motivation. They sing -- and we didn't tell them to do this, but at everyone's graduations they sing the national anthem in a way that truly will pull your Adam's Apple up into your throat because you actually see the potential at those locations.

What worries me is that we then turn them over to a police chief who may have bad habits from former times or a mid-grade army officer who believes that leadership is an entitlement not a responsibility. And so the constant effort we make is that developing leaders who are worthy, frankly, of leading these young men that were graduating out of the basic courses. We've made some great progress in that regard, but if you ask me what is, in my view, the biggest challenge, it's leader development, because as this army and these police forces are led, so will they perform. And for the most part, dramatically so, they're performing very well.

But that's not to say we don't have the occasional leader who doesn't measure up.

Q I just have a quick follow-up on that. I know last fall you were announcing an effort to try to bring back up to the rank of major, I think, officers from Saddam's old army. How is that going so far? How many have you brought back?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah, that's -- I -- that's the problem with doing multiple -- being here so long is the questions keep coming back, and now you're holding me accountable to -- (laughter) -- in fact, we recalled -- we sent the recall out. We had about 3,800 that expressed an interest. The screening process whittled it down to 2,700. Those 2,700 were scheduled into a series of academy classes for a six-week program. After the six-week program, we ended up with about 1,800 of them, and those 1,800 are performing very well.

Q How many did you want? Did you have a number?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, we -- you know, we wanted about 2,500. But now, the companion piece -- that's the recall. The companion pieces -- we recently graduated our third military academy class. There's three military academies, one in Ar Rustamiyah in Baghdad, one in Zakhu in northwest Kurdistan and one in Qatulan (ph) in northeast Kurdistan.

Common curriculum -- mixed ethnic composition, meaning this is a good thing for national unity. And we recently graduated our third class. So we've produced in the past year about 2,500 brand-new, never having served in any other system before young officers who are truly the future of the Iraqi military.

Q And you said 2,700 passed the screening; 1,800 made --

GEN. DEMPSEY: Made it through the coursework.

Q What -- any sense of what happened with those roughly --

GEN. DEMPSEY: No. Some of them opted out. Some of them failed out. Those are probably the two big categories. Some of them couldn't handle the -- didn't care to handle, I -- remember, now -- I think it's fair to say, and even some of the former officers would say in the former regime, leadership was an entitlement. You wanted to be a leader because you got certain things for it. And the system that Iraq is putting in place now -- not me; it's Minister of Defense Abdul Qader, and it's General Babakir, the chief of armed forces; and even on the national police side, it's Major General Adnan Thabet.

The pieces that they're putting in place right now are to build leaders who actually have to perform who have a loyalty to their subordinates and who have a loyalty to the greater Iraq. And as long as we keep that in moving in place, I think we're going to be okay.

Q And as long as you're taking follow-ups -- excuse me -- there were a bunch --

GEN. DEMPSEY: I'll take one more.

Q Okay.

GEN. DEMPSEY: That's it.

Q General, you twice mentioned national reconciliation.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Right.

Q What do you think of this idea that any national reconciliation would probably include some form of amnesty or pardon for insurgents -- not war criminals, not terrorists, but insurgents who in fact engaged and most likely killed Americans.

GEN. DEMPSEY: I think, Mick, that isn't there some sense of inevitability about that? I mean, if it's to be truly national reconciliation, then I think the Iraqi government is going to have to establish the white lines. And I think that we will privately enter into discussions with them about where the white lines exist. I think, though, that if they have hard evidence that someone has in fact killed another Iraqi or killed a coalition force member, I don't think that will fall into the boundaries that they establish that exclude someone from national reconciliation.

But I see huge opportunity in Prime Minister Maliki's stated interest in national reconciliation as one of the very first things he's doing, because if you think about the balance of the threat in Iraq and you've got, you know, militias on the one hand, let's say, and Sunni insurgents on the other hand, let's say -- al Qaeda's a separate issue; there's no reconciling with al Qaeda -- but unless we bring down, or the Iraqi government brings down the two halves of this other challenge simultaneously, then they will use the other to claim that they can't possibly disarm because the insurgents are not disarming. And if you talk to the insurgents, they'll say we can't possibly disarm because the Shi'a are not disarming. They have no choice but to approach both groups simultaneously. And I find their approach to be right on the money and I'm cheering them on.

Q Thank you.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Thank you.

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