



**U.S. Department of Defense**  
Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs)  
**News Transcript**

**On the Web:**

<http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=222>

Media contact: +1 (703) 697-5131/697-5132

**Public contact:**

<http://www.defenselink.mil/faq/comment.html>  
or +1 (703) 428-0711 +1

---

**Presenter: Army Colonel Michael Shields, Commander 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team**

**July 21,  
2006**

---

**DoD News Briefing with Colonel Shields from Iraq**

JIM TURNER (Pentagon Press Office): Colonel Shields, this is Jim Turner at the Pentagon Press Office. Can you hear me?

COL. SHIELDS: Yes, Jim, I can hear you.

MR. TURNER: Great. Let's get started, then.

Good morning. Our briefer today is Colonel Michael Shields. He is commander of the 172 Stryker Brigade Combat Team. Colonel Shields and his brigade are assigned to the Multinational Division North in Iraq, and have been deployed for about 10 months, operating primarily in the Mosul area. He's here today to provide us with an update on his unit's activities.

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

COL. SHIELDS: Good morning. Thanks for having me today. It's an honor to be able to tell the American public of the accomplishments of our Brigade Combat Team and what we've achieved in Nineveh province.

We're the 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, and I emphasize "team." We're from Alaska, but we're composed of Joint Forces, National Guard Forces, and we're made up approximately of 4,400 U.S. service men and women from the Army, Air Force and Navy. We've got approximately 10 coalition force battalions consisting of infantry, armor, aviation, artillery, and other capabilities to include military police from Germany, and we've got forces from as far north as Fort Drum and from Fort Campbell. We also have the 3rd ASOS from Eielson Air Force Base. Our organization includes two division Military Transition Teams that partner and advise from division level through battalion level within the Iraqi army, Iraqi Police Transition Teams and Iraqi Border Police Transition Teams from division through battalion level. We're supported by a magnificent civilian maintenance team. And our Police Transition Teams are augmented by Iraqi police liaison officers. All do a great job for the Brigade Combat Team.

We're distributed throughout Nineveh province to include Dohuk and Erbil and remote operating sites. Our population within Nineveh is approximately 3.85 million people and covers approximately 18,000 square

miles, roughly the size of Massachusetts and Connecticut combined. The demographics of our zone vary. We've got the Green Line for Iraqi Kurdistan to our north. Our zone features religious and ethnic diversity both in the Mosul area and out west, Mosul being predominately Sunni Arab on the west bank, and a mix on the east bank. Tall Afar, another large city to the west of Mosul, is a Shi'a-Sunni mix.

Our top priority and main effort are increasing the readiness of the Iraqi security forces. We're partnering advising and training Iraqi security forces to include the border police, the Iraqi police in Nineveh, Dohuk and Erbil, and two divisions of the Iraqi army.

The 172nd Brigade partners with the 2nd Iraq Army, which is about 11,000 troops commanded by Major General Jamal, and the 3rd Iraqi Army Division, which is about 7,000 troops commanded by Major General Khorshid (sp); provincial governments led by Governor Khasmoula, and the provincial police is led by Provincial Director of Police Major General Wafik (sp).

Our battalions partners with Iraqi army brigades and battalions, district police chiefs, mayors and subdistrict police stations, totaling seven brigades and 22 Iraqi army battalions, three emergency response battalions and 17 police districts. The Nineveh police number approximately 18,000, with about 8,000 in Mosul and about 2,000 in Tall Afar.

We train the Iraqi army and the Iraqi police as well to develop several outstanding training programs for both. We developed and resourced two Iraqi police basic skills academies, one in Hammam al Alil, which is now run by an Iraqi cadre -- we've gone from 30 to 200 students in that academy -- and one in Qaiyara that is administered by 411 Field Artillery and the police -- (audio break) -- and the Mosul Public Safety Academy and the Jordanian Police Academy.

We stood up and got the Northern Iraqi Regional Training Center off the ground in Hammam al Alil. We now have an Iraqi cadre that conducts a squad leader course, platoon sergeant course, junior officer course and combat medic course. Similar courses are also run at Al-Kisik and out in western Nineveh. Four-eleven Artillery runs an NCO academy at Qaiyara as well, and 117 Infantry developed a basic and advanced marksmanship course for the Iraqi army and the Iraqi police non-commissioned officer corps, which has now been handed off to the 2nd Division run, so that's a great news story.

Each battalion has developed a training program to partner with the support companies within the brigades and to increase their logistics capacity.

We continue to conduct counterinsurgency operations in Nineveh province to neutralize the threat. We also have 4th Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment, which is doing the same in the Euphrates River Valley in support of MND West.

Coalition force battalion commanders work closely with district mayors and subdistrict government leadership to include -- (audio break) -- not uncommon for one of our company commanders to partner with, advise, train and fight alongside an Iraqi army battalion commanded a brigadier general or colonel, a district police chief, several subdistrict police stations and community leadership.

Nineveh has come a long way in the last year and a half, two years. In November of 2004, the Iraqi police force in Nineveh collapsed, leading to general lawlessness in Mosul. By late December '04, the AIF had become bold enough to openly attack coalition forces in Mosul.

Now, the struggle for control of main supply route, camp and other key terrain in the city dominated the month of January, with the insurgency conducting numerous complex, coordinated attacks over the month.

With no Iraqi police in the city and the Iraqi national guard still in its infancy, coalition forces shouldered

the security responsibility for Mosul. The nationwide election to choose a transitional government at the end of January saw a 15 percent turnout among registered voters in Mosul; essentially, the Sunni population did not vote.

Tall Afar, about 30 miles west of Mosul, has a population of around 70,000 to 100,000 at this point, post-Operation Restoring Rights. After the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, insurgencies seized Tall Afar as a staging point for attacks. It has seen some limited sectarian violence between Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims. In May 2005, clashes broke out between the two groups. A military operation in June 2005 did not quell the violence, and the U.S. launched another offensive in the city in September 2005 called Operation Restoring Rights, which was conducted by 3rd ACR. More recently, the city has begun a rebuilding campaign.

We have successfully conducted two elections since then, the referendum and national election. We've seen a 311 percent increase in voter participation since last January's elections; a 51 percent increase for referendum and 61 percent for the national election.

We've gone from basically roughly 200,000 voters in January of '05 to over 800,000 voters in the last December election.

The security situation, the condition of the Iraqi security forces have improved in Nineveh since the winter of 2004. We have rebuilt 20 police stations and remodeled 12 more throughout Nineveh Province. Security in east and west Nineveh in the Tigris River Valley is good, and in several areas are ready to pursue economic development.

Fourteen Iraqi army battalions and two brigades have already assumed lead for COIN operations in Nineveh. The 2nd Iraqi Army Division has one brigade and eight battalions that have assumed lead for COIN operations, and the 3rd Division has one brigade and six battalions that have assumed lead for COIN operations. The great news here in Mosul is that 2nd Brigade from the 2nd Division will assume lead this Sunday, 23 July.

Assuming lead does not mean they are capable of conducting independent COIN operations. They're still in the process of fielding equipment and receiving training. Their logistics capability requires improvement and they still require coalition force support in the execution of COIN operations.

The provincial police and Iraqi army have improved the security situation here in Nineveh and been able to keep a good amount of the sectarian violence out of the province. We continue to degrade the ability of the insurgents from conducting successful attacks. Even with the insurgents' efforts to conduct attacks against Iraqi security forces, attacks remain largely unsuccessful and ineffective. The Iraqi police are on the streets every day, as are the Iraqi army forces.

The insurgents are unable to discourage the continued partnering, training and advising between coalition, Iraqi police and Iraqi army, and that's one of the strengths of the security forces here in Nineveh, is that the Iraqi police and the Iraqi army are working better together. And you see that on Operation Lion Hunt and Operation Sand Storm that have been ongoing over the last several months and are ongoing now. This partnership and training has raised ISF proficiency and advanced their capabilities from being able to participate in combined operations to leading combined operations.

We've seen and will likely see an increase in attacks against Iraqi security forces due to the increase in their effectiveness at neutralizing the insurgency and providing for the security of the people. The local populace is more confident with ISF capabilities and seem more willing to provide tips on insurgents' activity both to the ISF and to us. I would say they are cautiously optimistic.

Average attacks on coalition forces are about eight to 12 attacks per day. That's slightly up from the average over the last 10 months, which has been somewhere between seven and nine, somewhere in there. But

over the last year and half it has been as high as 10 attacks per day. So that's improved. Overall numbers have decreased since the collapse of the city security force in December of '04.

The security situation in Tall Afar remains stable. Tall Afar is in the rebuilding process. Money for reconstruction has been tied up with ministries in Baghdad, so a little has been done with regards to reconstruction, but there's a lot more work to do there.

The rate of AIF successful attacks remains low and, like I said, largely ineffective in intimidating the ISF or swaying local support, but they're attempting to do so and to intimidate the local population.

With that, I'll be happy to answer any questions you may have.

MR. TURNER: Okay. Let's get into the questions. Bob?

Q Colonel, this is Bob Burns of AP. I realize that decisions about transitioning security responsibility at the provincial level to the Iraqis is made at a higher level than you, but as the commander on the ground for the past 10 months, what's your assessment of when Nineveh Province would be ready to be -- security responsibility transferred to the Iraqis? This year? Next year?

COL. SHIELDS: You summarized the -- this would be event driven. We've seen good growth in provincial governance capacity. We've got a provincial reconstruction team here that was recently led by Cameron Munter, and Bruce Grant, have done a great job getting the provincial government out to the district and sub-district level. They have a program called the Provincial Outreach Program, in which they go to the remote districts, remote villages, listen to the mayors and the prominent local leaders' concerns.

There are several things that need to happen with developing budgetary guidance and priorities at the provincial level, and I would think, given where we're at right now and it being an event-driven process, I would say probably early winter, spring of '07 would be realistic. But again, that would be event-driven.

MR. TURNER: Jeff.

Q Colonel, Jeff Schogol with Stars and Stripes. You had mentioned that attacks against coalition forces are up slightly to about 8 to 12 today. To what do you attribute this increase in attacks?

COL. SHIELDS: That's a good question. Oftentimes we will see a spike in enemy activity if a key leader comes to Mosul. Oftentimes you'll have groups that will try to spike an activity to gain favor and to justify the allocations of funds for them to continue operations. So each time we see a spike, we look at that real closely.

The average increase in the number of attacks has not been great. We've gone from 10.3 attacks per day, roughly, back towards the end of '04, to about 7.1 attacks per day, and we're at about 8 now. So it's not a significant spike. We have seen a period, though, of increased activity where it could spike from, let's say, 7 attacks per day to possibly 15 to 19. But sometimes that's tied to a critical event; somebody comes in town that's a high level facilitator, and the local leadership is trying to gain favor, or a local cell is trying to receive financing.

So we've not seen a significant spike to the average number of attacks per day. But sometimes when we do see those increases, it's tied to some event that's going on perhaps in Mosul or an adjacent community.

Q A quick follow-up. You said these things happen when a leader comes to the town. Do you know -- are you talking about al Qaeda in Iraq, local-based Sunnis? What kind of organization are you talking about?

COL. SHIELDS: It's difficult to actually pin down the specific organization. We have al Qaeda in Iraq that operate in our area, Ansar al-Sunna. There are reports of Badr and JEM. But we've got a Shi'a minority up here,

so it's difficult for those organizations to operate.

It's less important for us to figure out what colors they're wearing then it is to neutralize the threat and reduce their effectiveness on the community. And so sometimes it could be tied to an al Qaeda leader that's coming into town. But for us, sometimes it's challenging actually pinpointing is he tied to al Qaeda, Ansar al-Sunna, are they working together?

And that's part of the challenge with determining the specific organization that these leaders come from.

Q Colonel, this is Courtney Kube from NBC News. You mentioned the numbers of the attacks on coalition specifically. Do you have any numbers on the levels of attacks against civilians in the area? Have they been going up as well?

COL. SHIELDS: We see -- we have seen on average somewhere in between I'd say 18 to 22 attacks against civilians that actually get reported. Of course, the challenge is the reported piece. We've got a very good provincial Joint Coordination Center that has a tips hotline. We receive call-ins from locals as to attacks or intimidation against civilians. And so we track somewhere on the average, somewhere, like I said, in the area of 20 to 22 attacks, but that's very difficult to assess and put your finger on. Some of this can be tribal. Some of it can be business related, and some of it can be crime or terrorist related.

Q Is that about 20 or 22 per day? And what are the types of attacks you're seeing?

COL. SHIELDS: I'm sorry. Can you say that again?

Q When you say it's 18 to 22, is that 18 to 22 attacks per day? And can you give us an example of what types of attacks you're seeing? Are they kidnappings or what?

COL. SHIELDS: That's not per day. That would be on average per week reported through the provincial Joint Coordination Center. We see kidnappings. You'll see extortions for money, where groups are trying to raise money. Generally, it can be a measure of effectiveness. If we're interdicting the financiers and the ability to finance operations, kidnapping and ransom is one way the terrorists have to raise money. But it's also -- it also can be a link for crime as well.

Q Colonel, my name's Drew Brown with McClatchy Newspapers. What about IED attacks in your area? Are these increasing, decreasing? Have you seen an increased use of shaped charges in your sector? And what effect or how effective are these -- have these been?

COL. SHIELDS: We've seen a slight increase in IEDs in our area, but we've not seen the charges that you've just referenced. We're fortunate that we've got the Stryker Combat Vehicle, which is very survivable, and we've seen reduced effectiveness of the IED attacks, but a slight increase in the number of IED attacks. There is not -- there has also been homemade explosives, homemade explosive devices, and so it's not just military grade explosives. You'll see some homemade IEDs and bombs also make their way out into our zone as well.

Q Colonel, this is Kay Maddox from the Voice of America. Yesterday, the senior Muslim clerics called for peace and an end to this rising sectarian violence overall to support the government. Can you sort of give us a general picture of how you're sector's doing compared to the rest of Iraq in terms of this increasing sectarian violence?

COL. SHIELDS: We have been fortunate in that we've not seen that level of sectarian violence in Nineveh province. I think we're fortunate in several regards, one of which, though, is that Governor Kashmoula and the provincial chief of police of both commanding generals work well together and they have great outreach to the district and subdistrict level.

The brigade commanders for the Iraqi army and the district police chiefs work well together, and we're starting to see increased efficiency with the battalion commanders and the district/subdistrict police chiefs working well together.

A good example of that would have been following the Samarra mosque bombing, we did not really have any residual effect in Nineveh province from that, but I would tell you that it was because all of the Iraqi security forces were engaged throughout Mosul and Nineveh province to preclude that from happening.

That doesn't mean that there's not entities up here that would like to get that started. We had a suicide-VBIED that went off out west in the city of Sinjar not too long ago that caused some casualties. But the good news is that the local leadership was able to talk to the people that lived in the area. The security forces were able to maintain control, and there was no retaliation.

So we've not seen that level of sectarian violence in Nineveh. Matter of fact, we have seen, though, some personnel move up into Nineveh from down south into the Mosul area, Nineveh Plains area, as a result of some of the violence down south. But the good news for Nineveh province is we've not seen that. But we have everybody that's working very hard to look for indicators of that to preclude that from happening up here.

Q A quick follow-up on an unrelated topic. You mentioned that you do training of the Iraqi security forces. Can you articulate what the biggest challenge is in getting the Iraqis trained up to take over? What are your biggest problems that you confront on a daily basis?

COL. SHIELDS: One of the larger institutional challenges with the Iraqi army will be literacy, selecting soldiers with the right skill sets to go on to Taji or on to advanced schooling for some of the speciality MOS's. So we're trying to develop programs where we increase the literacy within Iraqi security forces, both police and the army. They've gone from kind of a centralized planning process, and we're trying to work with them to decentralize a little bit. But they're enthusiastic. We have to conduct training sometimes in both Kurdish and Arabic, and so that slows it down a little bit. And there's a little bit of challenge with the leave policy at times with boots on the ground.

But we've got, for instance, in 2nd Division -- we've got three great brigade commanders that are working that piece real hard and has really made quite an improvement.

But those are some of the things that we're working through. Logistically, they don't have all their equipment yet, and so that's why I said earlier, capable of conducting -- or taking lead for counterinsurgency operations but not capable of independent counterinsurgency operations. We still assist and partner and train with regards to logistics capabilities and providing enablers. Of course, we still fight alongside both the Iraqi police and the Iraqi army as well.

Q Colonel, I'm Carl Osgood with Executive Intelligence Review. Have you seen much reaction in the population there to the events in Lebanon?

COL. SHIELDS: The short answer is no. But honestly, it's -- I'm saying that because we haven't been out asking the question. And so I can't answer it based on any research that we've done or any atmospherics we have gone out and pursued.

Q Colonel, it's Nick Simeone at Fox News. Are you seeing Sunni leaders or just Sunnis in general coming to you and asking that American troops, coalition troops stay, fearing the Shi'ites and reprisal attacks by Shi'ites now?

COL. SHIELDS: No, I would not say it's limited exclusively to Sunni. The provincial government is not

Sunni-heavy, but certainly the Iraqi police are Sunni-heavy, so -- we also have Kurd officers and units with Kurd soldiers that are in them as well. And we see -- I mean, that request is really consistent across the population -- not consistent throughout the populace, but there are Sunni Arab leaders that would say that. There are Kurd leaders that would say that. And there are Shi'a leaders -- we've got Shi'a officers within the 2nd Division and the 3rd Division as well.

MR. TURNER: Drew.

Q Colonel, this is Drew Brown again. Have you noticed anything about how the enemy is operating in your area, any shift in tactics? And if so, how?

COL. SHIELDS: No, we've not really seen a shift in tactics. Of course, you know, this threat -- they're in civilian clothes, they don't wear uniforms, they hide behind women and children -- you know, they attack women and children, for that matter. And so I've not seen any shift recently in their tactics. IEDs are probably the most prevalent form of attacking coalition and Iraqi security forces, but they'll attempt to use indirect fire and small-arms fire as well.

I do think that we're seeing a slight increase against Iraqi police and Iraqi security forces, but I think that's largely due to their increase and readiness and the fact that they're willing to fight to provide for the security and stability of the citizens of Nineveh.

MR. TURNER: Bob.

Q Colonel, Bob Burns from AP. I'm just wondering if, during your time there, you had come across any old Iraqi chemical munitions.

COL. SHIELDS: No, we haven't.

MR. TURNER: Jeff.

Q Colonel, Jeff with Stars and Stripes again. You had mentioned the leave rate. Can you give us a ballpark of how many Iraqi soldiers and police are on leave right now in your sector?

COL. SHIELDS: I'm sorry, can you say that again?

Q You had mentioned the leave rate as a challenge that you face in training Iraqi security forces. Of the Iraqi security forces that you fight alongside with, can you give us an estimate of how many of them are on leave right now?

COL. SHIELDS: I'd say on average possibly 25 percent, and that's with the units that are following the leave policy. And that's pretty consistent across the divisions. And every now and then you'll have a unit where somebody will break that threshold, but on average, about 25 percent of an organization is on leave at any one point.

Q (Off mike) -- gotten to, say, 50 percent?

COL. SHIELDS: Say again?

Q Has it ever gotten as high as, say, 50 percent?

COL. SHIELDS: Fifty percent on leave? (Pause.) I'm sorry, did you say has it been as high as 50 percent on leave?

Q Yes. Let me rephrase the question. We've heard that in some units it's been as high as 50 percent. Has it ever gotten that high? If not, what's the highest it's gotten to?

COL. SHIELDS: Oh, I think somewhere -- it's gotten as high as 30 to 50 percent in some organizations, but a lot of that is past history. Kind of pre-election or post -- right after election, we saw a spike in leaves, but with the professionalization of the officer corps, for instance, in 2nd Division, we've recently received three new brigade commanders, all military academy graduates, and several new battalion commanders. We're really not seeing that and I haven't seen that lately. But if you would have asked me that maybe around December timeframe, I'd say you could get upwards of 30 to 50 percent in some units. But across the 3rd division and the 2nd Division, I would say that we're not seeing that right now.

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

Q Colonel, this is Drew Brown again. I just want to make sure I understand you correctly. You said that attacks against Iraqi police and security forces are up. Does that mean that attacks against your forces are dropping? Are the insurgents attacking the Iraqis more and the Americans less?

COL. SHIELDS: That's kind of a trend we're starting to see. Again, with regards to the math, it's not great in terms of the delta, but we're seeing a slight decrease in attacks against coalition forces, and certainly with the success rate, and we're seeing a slight increase in attacks against Iraqi police and Iraqi army. And so that would be a true statement. We've seen that over the last month.

Q What do you think this means?

COL. SHIELDS: Pardon me?

Q What do you think this trend means, or what does it portend?

COL. SHIELDS: What we think is that the ISF are a legitimate threat to the AIF achieving their goals and their objectives in Nineveh Province.

We've gone from no police in Mosul back in 2004 to 18,000 police in Mosul -- or correction in Nineveh. We have over 8,000 police in Mosul alone, and over 2,000 police in Tall Afar. We've got two Iraqi army divisions that are between, for instance, 3rd Division's about 7,000 and 2nd Division is around 11,000, and they're making a difference on the street. And they're partnering and they're doing combined operations on the street, and they're engaging with the population. That relationship has not been seen before.

I've had Iraqis come up to me on the street and say, "This is great. We've never seen Iraqi police working with the Iraqi army like this." And it is becoming, I think, a legitimate credible threat to the aims and the objectives of the insurgent forces in Nineveh province, and I think that we're going to see an attempt to continue to attack Iraqi security forces here in the future. And we will continue to partner with and train them, make them more capable in the counterinsurgency and more lethal.

MR. TURNER: Okay, with that, Colonel Shields, do you have any final thoughts you would like to share with us?

COL. SHIELDS: I'd just like to say I'm incredibly proud of the team that we've got, and that Americans should be proud of the 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team. And again, when I say "team," I mean the entire team -- National Guard, Reserves, Joint Forces, and everybody that's fighting that's part of the organization in this counterinsurgency. It's really made a difference in terms of partnering, advising and raising the readiness and the proficiency of the Iraqi security forces. We do have some economic development that is occurring in

some areas, and we've seen improvements in governance within Nineveh and that's a positive step. We've got the best equipment money can buy. Our soldiers know it, and it enables and empowers them. And they're incredibly lethal on the street.

I would say get well quickly to our soldiers that are back in the states conducting rehab, and our thoughts and prayers are with families who have lost loved ones over here.

That's all I've got. Thanks.

MR. TURNER: Thank you, Colonel Shields. We hope to see you again here in the Pentagon briefing room soon.

(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.

FOR INFORMATION ON SUBSCRIBING TO FNS, PLEASE CALL JACK GRAEME AT 202-347-1400.