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Presenter: Commander Multinational Corps Iraq, Lt. Gen. Peter Chiarelli September 15, 2006 9:00 AM EDT

DoD News Briefing with Lt. Gen. Chiarelli from Iraq

(Note: General Chiarelli appears via teleconference from Iraq.)

BRYAN WHITMAN (deputy assistant secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Well, good morning. We might actually get started a little bit early this morning because you're here. General Chiarelli is with us from Camp Victory.

General, can you hear me okay?

GEN. CHIARELLI: I can, sir. How are you?

MR. WHITMAN: I'm doing fine, thank you. This is Bryan Whitman at the Pentagon briefing room with the Pentagon press corps. And we want to thank you this morning for taking some time to be with us.

This is Lieutenant General Pete Chiarelli. He's the commanding general of Multinational Corps Iraq. He assumed that position and command in January of this year, and he directs the operations of the joint and coalition forces in all sectors of Iraq.

The last time I think you were with us, General, was back in May. And again, we appreciate you taking this time this morning and particularly for making your subordinate commanders available each week for us to be able to get a perspective from the ground on what's going on in Iraq.

So with that, let me turn it over to you for some opening remarks before we get into some questions.

GEN. CHIARELLI: Thank you, sir. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and thank you for attending today's briefing.

As you know, Multinational Corps Iraq has been very busy. I'd like to provide you with an update on our operations and address a few recent issues before taking questions.

I guess an appropriate place to start would be with the Baghdad security plan. Baghdad, as I think you all know, is our main effort. And in military parlance, we have weighted that main effort with the movement of additional forces into Baghdad, both from other parts of Iraq and with the extension of the 172nd.

We have seen a decrease in sectarian violence in the month that the Baghdad security plan has been being executed. In addition to that, I can report to you that conditions in those areas that we are -- have cleared and we are now holding and getting ready for the build phase have definitely improved.

I've been into every one of those areas. I've talked with the people. I've seen markets open up. I've seen people on the streets at times when there used not to be anyone on the streets. And I've even seen people returning to their neighborhoods, as I did in Dura the other day, when I talked to a family who had moved out when the violence was very, very high and were very appreciative of our efforts in Dura, as they are all over Baghdad, to lower the sectarian violence.

I do want to say we can't be everywhere at once. Baghdad is a city of anywhere between 6 and 7 -- (audio break from source) -- very deliberate -- (audio break from source) -- and we want to ensure that when we go into neighborhoods, that we do lower the level of violence, and we're -- (audio break from source) -- security forces, both the Iraqi army and the Iraqi police, to keep the level of violence down. And so far, it's working.

The critical phase of this -- (audio break from source) -- before the build phase. And the key partner in that build phase is the Iraqi government. We are looking to the Iraqi government, and they are moving to provide the basic services and improvement in the conditions in each one of those focus areas. And I think you know the number of focus areas increases every single day. We are currently working operations on the east side of the river, and we will continue to do that in the days and the months ahead.

On a negative note, I would indicate that in some of the areas, when I go down and talk to some folks, there is a perceived feeling that they have (been ?) denied basic services. And I know the Iraqi government is moving as fast as they possibly can to reverse that perception.

But we're very, very pleased with what has occurred with the Baghdad security plan, and we look forward in the months ahead to seeing conditions in Baghdad continue to improve.

There's been a lot talked about lately about Al Anbar province. I've watched the media coverage play out for two days over the classified Al Anbar intelligence assessment, and I must say, from my standpoint, I'm disappointed.

For a commander, the real victim of this particular incident is the open communications that commanders have with staffs. And if there's been a casualty, I fear that may be it. We're doing everything to ensure that that is not the case. However, you always worry that when a classified report ends up in the open press, a report that was written from an intelligence officer to his commander, that the fact that he's called to task and this thing ends up being discussed can create an effect that commanders don't want to see. We rely on our staff officers to give us their best estimate, and I don't think there's anybody better at doing that than Colonel Pete Devlin. I've always been proud to go out to Al Anbar and get an assessment from Pete, and he always tells me exactly how it is.

I think in this particular case, if you read the report, Pete is right on target. I don't believe there is any military strategy alone, any kinetic operations that we can run alone that will create the conditions for victory which we must have. I think the real heart of what Pete was telling us is that there are economic and political conditions that have to improve out at Al Anbar, as they do everywhere in Iraq, for us to be successful.

I'll let others decide and you decide whether it's appropriate for a classified report to be handled in this way, but I do have issues with those that would leak such a report because I think many of them have been in my shoes and other commanders' shoes and understand the real criticality of having staff officers feel free to lay out what their concerns are and lay out good-quality analysis.

Yes, in Al Anbar we in fact do have significant challenges, but despite some media statements to the

contrary, we are not -- and I repeat, we are not -- looking to walk away from that province. That is just flat wrong. We are committed to the people of Al Anbar and will remain committed to the people of Al Anbar and do everything possible to make their life better.

I think you all know that Al Anbar was the last province where we stood up Iraqi security forces. Those Iraqi security forces have assumed some battlespace and they will assume more and more as the days go on.

We've had recruiting challenges out there. One of the issues is literacy. And we're working now on programs that would give those who want to join the military at Al Anbar the literacy skills that they need to go ahead and join. And this is one of the areas that the Iraqi minister of Defense has been insistent on, is that the soldiers all over Iraq meet certain skills.

But we've seen some positive things in recruiting, both in the Iraqi army and in the Iraqi police out in Al Anbar, and we really believe that we're going to continue to see that progress as the time goes on.

I think another issue that has been in everybody's mind is numbers and really what is the definition of sectarian violence, and this is one of the most difficult things for us to get a handle on. Exactly what is it? I said before that we viewed sectarian violence with totally different lenses prior to the bombing in Samarra in February of last year than we do today. And the definition of that is very, very difficult. I've watched people argue over whether or not Iraq is in a civil or is not a civil war. I state emphatically I do not believe it is, but I do believe sectarian violence is something we've got to get a handle on.

Now, how do you define that? It's very, very difficult. If I was to take this pen and hold it up and ask you what it is, just about everyone would tell me it's a pen. But if I was to in fact give you the details of an attack that occurs in Baghdad or elsewhere in Iraq on a daily basis and ask you to determine whether it's sectarian or not sectarian, I think that I'd get a bunch of different answers. For me, we will get a couple of things. We will get who conducted the attack, how they conducted the attack and why.

AQI has been conducting large-signature attacks throughout Iraq prior to the bombing in Samarra and after the bombing in Samarra. They are in fact spectacular attacks designed to kill a large number of people. And in the post-Samarra bombing period, they have stated point-blank that they conduct those attacks to incite sectarian violence. When a VBID, or vehicle-borne improvised device, goes off in the center of Sadr City or anywhere where there's a large Shi'a population, what we have seen in the post-Samarra period is a reaction -- a reaction from death squads, death squads who may move to Sunni neighborhoods, Sunnis who move -- the attack takes place in a Sunni neighborhood to Shi'a neighborhoods. And what we see in this instance is executions, executions of individuals, individuals that are picked off the street, sometimes from lists, taken to a location and tortured, some not even taken to a location and tortured and just executed. To me, that is the difference that I've seen in that period from post-February and the thing that we've got to get a handle on and we're working so hard to get a handle on, to not allow AQI to use these spectacular attacks to create the conditions with -- which allow a spiral of sectarian violence throughout Iraq.

The numbers that are reported are different. Some of the numbers that have come out in the news briefs have been different than ours. They have their sources; we attempt at all times to ensure that we investigate every single event that occurs, and sometimes we don't agree with those numbers.

We will always do our best to tell you the truth in what we see, and sometimes that takes longer for us to get to the bottom. For some, I'm sure that there are agendas that are being worked, and I understand that. But these are some of the things that occur as a young democracy is in fact growing here in Iraq.

The numbers I tracked for August prime period indicate a decrease in sectarian violence in the focus areas. Now that's not to say there weren't additional attacks that take place outside those focus areas, but we're

moving to those areas, and even in those areas, the numbers were lower.

With that, I will stop and take your questions.

MR. WHITMAN: Well, General, thank you for that comprehensive overview, and we do have a few questions here so we'll get right into it.

Bob.

Q General, this is Bob Burns from AP. I'd like to take you to back to your comments about what's happening in Anbar province. When General Zilmer conducted an interview earlier this week to talk about the report, he said that defeating the insurgents is not his mission.

And my question for you is, whether you're talking about Anbar or any other part of Iraq, when did you reach the point in the counterinsurgency fight where you're not fighting to win?

GEN. CHIARELLI: Well, we are fighting to win, but we understand that winning is a combination of a whole bunch of things in this insurgency we're fighting, and as I've indicated time and time again, this is different than any other fight I believe the United States of America has ever found itself in. And I quite frankly think that this is a fight that will characterize -- many of the characteristics of this fight will be characteristics of future fights if we get into them.

It is a blend of both kinetic and non-kinetic effects, and the non-kinetic effects are many times as important and often more important than the kinetic effects. And that's what's different. And that is really what Pete Devlin said in his report, and I think he was right. We need political support, we need economic support at Al Anbar. When we do that, it will have an effect on security in Al Anbar and drive down security.

As I mentioned before -- and it is true again in -- anywhere I go, not only in Baghdad, it's true up in MND-North, it's true in the West, it's true down in the South -- when you go to a governor, when you go to a local official, and you ask them, "What can we do to lower the level of violence?" their number one answer, the thing they always tell us is, "Find jobs for the angry young men." And that's part of the economic development that Pete talked about in his report, and that's what we need. We need help, and we've got commitment from the Iraqi government for help. And as quick as we can get that help out there to start working those economic conditions, I think that that is, in fact, a strategy for victory. The combination of both kinetic, which are occurring every single day in Al Anbar, every place else, and non-kinetic effects, which were just so absolutely critical.

MR. WHITMAN: Will.

Q General, this is Will Dunham with Reuters.

You mentioned that you're not walking away from Anbar province. But do you have enough U.S. troops there to wage and win a counterinsurgency fight, and could you use more?

GEN. CHIARELLI: There's not a commander in the world who wouldn't say he could use more forces. But I believe we have the forces that we need in Al Anbar, understanding that Al Anbar today is a supporting effort to what we're doing in Baghdad.

Every time I have asked for additional forces and run that up through General Casey, I've got what I've asked for. There's never been a question about that. And I think the recent events in Baghdad prove that.

There was a part in Pete's report that wasn't mentioned, and I'll go ahead and add to it, and he indicated, and he indicated quite correctly in his report that the number of coalition and Iraqi forces has, in fact, increased

slightly over the time that the 1st MEF has been in Al Anbar.

So I feel that given the conditions we've got in Baghdad, we've got the force posture exactly where it needs to be. And we will reevaluate, and I reevaluate, as well as General Casey reevaluates our force requirements every single day, and we will continue to do that. And if we require additional forces, we will ask for them.

MR. WHITMAN: Nick, good to see you back.

Q Thanks. General, Nick Simeone, Fox News. Having said that, what is your reaction to Pete Devlin's view that another division is needed in Anbar to do the job?

GEN. CHIARELLI: That's Pete's opinion. That's Pete's opinion. And I've got an entire staff that would take that recommendation, a recommendation from a G-2 -- or Rick Zilmer does, he would take that recommendation and run it by the rest of the members of his staff. I promise you, his G-3 operations officer would be absolutely critical of that. He would look at his mission, what we want them to do, he would look at the conditions not only in Al Anbar but in the theater. All of the MND commanders have been very consistent in their belief that Baghdad is our main effort right now. And as I indicated in my opening comments, in military parlance we always win our main effort, and that's what we're doing right now, we're going to continue to do that till we get the conditions in Baghdad where they need to be.

MR. WHITMAN: Peter.

Q General Chiarelli, Peter Spiegel with the Los Angeles Times. I'd like to change the topic. It's been over two months now since General Bargewell -- you signed off on his report about the chain of command reaction to the incident in Haditha. We still haven't had any public disclosure of what his findings were, and we haven't had any disciplinary action, as far as we can tell, against those involved. Can you address why that is? And perhaps more importantly, does that send the wrong signal -- aren't you concerned it sends the wrong signal to leaders currently on the ground that the military perhaps will just sort of kick it down the road a bit and not act quickly on some of these new threats -- these incidents, because -- of chain of command incidents?

GEN. CHIARELLI: We have acted quickly.

And before I get into Haditha, let me add one more comment to that last question. Your question really goes to the point I was trying to make, and that is that I want staff officers and every commander wants staff officers at all levels to give them their best advice, and that's what Pete did. And I'm really worried, how this has been handled, that it will have a stultifying effect on people laying out their views. And I think all of you who have covered intelligence for a long time would agree with me, if there's any area we want people to tell us exactly what they think, it's in the area of intelligence, and Pete did that.

In regards to Haditha, I forwarded my report up the chain of command. I completed my action on it. We have taken action. I think the values training that we -- was reported and conducted for a month in the month of June was an example of some of the things that we've done.

In addition to that, I've taken a hard look at reporting throughout MNCI and down -- in all the MNDs. General Casey has done the same for MNF-I. And we have done the necessary adjustments to our reporting procedures to ensure that we understand some of those lessons.

My report went to MNF-I and then to CENTCOM and it was passed to MARCENT. And this is a different situation than I've ever been in before, but it was passed to MARCENT, where it should go, for inclusion in the ongoing NCIS investigation. And that investigation is ongoing. As long as it's ongoing, it would be inappropriate for me to comment as to how my report -- my portion of the report in that investigation as long as the NCIS

investigation has in fact gone on.

But I would say again all those recommendations that I had, that Eldon had and that I looked at that were part of that report, we have taken action on. And we will continue. I am looking very, very hard at conducting additional values training, not because we've had additional incidents but because I think it's an absolute critical thing, when you put soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines in this kind of condition in this kind of fight, that you take the time to go back and review our values and why we are different and those critical core values that are part of all our services.

MR. WHITMAN: Barbara?

Q General Chiarelli, Barbara Starr from CNN. I wanted to go back to Bob Burns' very first question and your answer. Understanding what you said about economic and political progress being part of winning, nonetheless General Zilmer's comments that it's not the mission of the U.S. military to win kinetically, I'm still confused.

When was that decided? How was that decided? Was that some conclusion that the military came to at some point? Can you shed any light on it? And is it your feeling that the U.S. troops in the field understand that it's not their job at this point to win as troops kinetically against the insurgents?

GEN. CHIARELLI: Ma'am, it is our job to win. And I think that if Rick had an opportunity to look at that today, he might say that, yeah, it is our job to win. But winning is a combination of not only what U.S. forces do on the ground but our Iraqi counterparts. I think you all know that we have passed control of the 8th Iraqi Division to the IGFC, the Iraqi Ground Force Command. We will continue to pass additional divisions to them. And we are both in this, the Iraqi security forces and the United States military, to win, and I'll state emphatically that our job is to win in Al Anbar. But it is not the kind of fight that is going to be won by military kinetic action alone. It's a combination across all the lines of operations that I talked about so long, and as far as my position on that, that shouldn't be a surprise to anyone. And I think that when the history is written of this fight, it will not be compared with any other fight that we've ever been in. And it's absolutely critical that we get all those lines of operations going in order to win, and we are dependent on the Iraqi government to help us in that process.

Commitments have been made out in Al Anbar. I hope that those commitments come through and come through sooner rather than later, and when they do, they will go a long way to our combined goal of winning in Al Anbar.

MR. WHITMAN: Pam, a question?

Q Thank you. General, this is Pam Hess with United Press International. I want to take you back to Anbar province. Could you explain for us in a little bit more detail why you think you don't need more troops in Anbar, particularly given what you said about the development economically and politically out there? You can't do that unless you have at least a measure, at least a perception of security. And the fact that a battalion of strikers was taken out of Anbar and put into Baghdad sort of raises some questions. Can Anbar really afford that? It's always been the most dangerous place, certainly for U.S. troops, except for maybe in the last few months in Baghdad. So could you explain why more troops would not be better in Anbar, where there's really not even -- (inaudible) -- on security?

GEN. CHIARELLI: Well, I disagree with you there.

First of all, the forces that were taken out of Al Anbar and moved to support the Baghdad Security Plan were part of the process that I talked about of winning the main effort. We were able to go ahead and move those forces because Iraqi forces have stood up in Al Anbar as everywhere else that we've pulled forces from.

Now, the forces that we took out, out of Al Anbar, were nowhere near any of the locations that you would commonly look at for increased violence in Al Anbar. And so far the impact of moving those forces out, from my standpoint, has had no impact on some of the things that you read about every day.

Now, we made a conscious decision in how we're fighting this fight out in Ramadi. It is a combined fight with us and Iraqi security forces. And I think the success that you see out in Al Anbar and that -- is the fact that we have integrated those Iraqi security forces. Most noteworthy, besides the army, is the integration of the Iraqi police. We literally have police in cities that never had police forces before. But at the same time, that's going to take time. And recruiting efforts at times have been less than we wanted. We had very, very high goals for ourselves in recruiting. We saw that turn around last month. We had a little bit of a dip this month in Iraqi police. But we're already seeing conditions that show that that will turn around.

We've identified some of the issues we've got. I mentioned one of them, literacy requirements. And we're working very, very hard with Marty Dempsey to come up with some options that would allow us to recruit additional soldiers and in fact allow additional soldiers who want to join the army to meet the basic literacy requirements that the Ministry of Defense is in fact intent on ensuring are in place. And I totally agree with the Ministry of Defense on that, on maintaining those literacy requirements.

So you know, again, I see Al Anbar maybe in a different lens than even Rick Zilmer does. But I feel very comfortable that we're moving in the right direction in Al Anbar.

And when we do an evaluation, if it's determined that we need additional forces out in Al Anbar, we'll look to move those forces out there.

But again, the main effort is Baghdad, and we must ensure that we weight the main effort. Armies that don't weight the main effort really don't ever have a main effort. And that's not the case with this force. General Casey is totally focused on ensuring that we keep what we need in Baghdad to do the job we need to have done.

MR. WHITMAN: Jonathan?

Q Jonathan Karl with ABC News. So on that main effort, you said in your opening remarks that by your numbers, by your count, that the sectarian killings in Baghdad have gone down since August. I'm wondering if you can give us some more details, what those numbers are, how big of a decrease.

And also, do you have any further details on this VBIED attack yesterday that wounded so many American soldiers? How was it that they managed to inflict such damage on the U.S. troops?

GEN. CHIARELLI: Well, I think that what has been reported so far is accurate on that particular SVBIED. It was a suicide vehicle-borne improvised device. They've been reported correctly. Based on first reports -- and I still consider them first reports until the investigation is complete -- based on those first reports, we've taken some corrective action to ensure that it doesn't happen in other locations.

But that's where we are on that right now, and I really don't want to comment until that investigation is complete.

But I promise you there'll be a full and thorough investigation, and we'll take all the necessary actions as they are uncovered to conclude something like that from happening before.

Again, I think you all know that we had 32 casualties. It's a possibility to date that we had 33 casualties. We had two soldiers that were killed in action. One soldier who was BSI, one who was SI. Non-serious injuries were 17, and 11 will return to duty. In addition to that, I'm sorry to add that we now have a soldier that we are counting as missing and appropriate notifications will be made.

I forgot the first part of your question, Jonathan. Could you help me with that?

Q (Inaudible) -- that missing soldier, what's going on there?

GEN. CHIARELLI: Exactly what I told you. We now have a missing soldier.

Q (Off mike) -- connection with that specific SVBIED?

GEN. CHIARELLI: Right. Fine.

Q The first question was about -- (inaudible) -- that sectarian violence, you said the numbers had gone down.

GEN. CHIARELLI: Yeah, I mean, if you take the original numbers that were announced in that particular incident, both the MOI crushing the MOH, and we were -- I think the same. We agree on the numbers. The MOH later made a correction, and they made a correction based on facts and data that they have. If, as in most of these incidents, the truth lies somewhere in between, I think you would still have to stay, if I remember those numbers correctly, that we had over a 35 percent decrease last month in sectarian violence as we define it, as I tried to lay out for you in our opening comments. I think Bill Caldwell said yesterday that we've seen a spike in the last couple of days. We're doing everything necessary, everything we possibly can to drive that spike back down again, but I will tell you, some of the numbers that I've seen reported and what happened in Baghdad yesterday surely do not in fact -- I can't prove that those numbers are correct, and again, they seem inflated. And I will -- from my standpoint.

But I will tell you that we will every single time go out and investigate those because I feel an absolute requirement to give you the truth as we know it, and that's exactly what we're doing. There's no attempt here whatsoever to say the numbers are lower when they are in fact not. It's our attempt to try to understand this phenomena as well as we can understand this phenomena and come up with metrics that allow us to see whether or not our campaign is having success. And to date, I will tell you it is.

But again, Baghdad is a huge city, and then, as we've into some of these areas, we've had problems pop up outside those areas. We've got the forces we need to move to those areas and work them, and we continue to expand the number of cleared beladiyahs, the number of districts and areas in Baghdad that we both clear, hold and move to the build phase. But it's a city of 7 million people, and that is going to take time. And this is not a short-term operation. I just got to emphasize that.

Think of Chicago, and that's basically the situation we have here in Baghdad in a city the size of Chicago, where we're trying to knock down sectarian violence and go after those folks, those death squads that have caused this new form of violence, that if left unchecked, could lead to civil war.

MR. WHITMAN: We'll take one more question.

Gordon, you've been trying to get one in.

Q General, Gordon Lubold from Army Times. We spoke with the Iraqi deputy prime minister yesterday, who continued to go out of his way to say that there was, you know, a lot of influence from Syria, especially with regard to Anbar provinces. Others here in the Pentagon have made a point of saying that recently.

Can you just say what, if anything, you're doing to beef up the border? Is this a concern for you as well? What's being done?

GEN. CHIARELLI: All the borders of Iraq are a concern for us, and we've worked very, very hard. Two hundred and fifty-six border forts have been built in Iraq. I was just out to one of those border forts -- not on the Syrian side, but on the Iranian side -- yesterday; talked to the captain in charge of a 42-man border team that is working there, talked to the MiTTs that are working there, and talked to the Brits who are working with those forces. And as we're doing on the Iranian border, we're doing the same thing on the Syrian border. And every single day, those border teams get stronger and stronger, they get stronger because of the commitment of American forces.

One of the places that we've increased the number out in Al Anbar is this time last year we had no border training teams. Today we've got border training teams throughout Al Anbar on the Syrian border, and they're working with the Iraqi Border Police to make them more and more professional every single day. There's tremendous logistics challenges when you move that far out west, particularly when Baghdad is a hub. And one of the issues that we've had to work with, both the Iraqi army and the Iraqi Border Police, are some of the logistics issues of getting fresh food out to them, make sure they have the necessary amount of fuel. But every day that gets better and better. And I think you're going to see that. In much the same way you saw the improvement in Iraq security forces, we're seeing a similar improvement in Iraqi border forces on all borders in Iraq.

MR. WHITMAN: Well, General, again we want to thank you for your time. We've come to the end of the time we've allocated for this. And let me just turn it back to you in case you have a few closing comments that you'd like to make.

GEN. CHIARELLI: Just a little comment that I'd like to make. I had a great trip yesterday down to MND-Southeast, and I had the opportunity to go up into Maysan, as I indicated earlier, and go up to one of the border forts and visit British forces that are patrolling that border. I think many of you know that they moved out of Camp Abu Naji and they are currently along the entire length of the Iranian border working with Iraqi border teams up there.

Yesterday, before I went out, somebody handed me an article. I believe it was from The Washington Post. And I read it in that a party spokesman or a militia spokesman stated that once the coalition leaves, Iraq will descend into civil war. This individual indicated that the resulting casualties were viewed as inevitable and acceptable, and he predicted that his particular party would prevail.

It was interesting -- when I went up to Maysan yesterday, I took a brief about six kilometers short of the border. And that particular area was the scene of a battle in the Iran-Iraq War less than 20 years ago. And it's always interesting for us to talk with our Iraqi counterparts in the Iraqi army about that war. And many of the soldiers that are in the Iraqi army today fought in that war. Many of leaders fought in that war.

And I was absolutely stunned when I was told by the British lieutenant colonel who briefed me that at this particular location, official counts were that 1 million people had been killed. And he indicated that if I had the opportunity to go down and talk to locals, they would tell me that it was really 3 million people had been killed in this particular battle.

We then left that location, and I drove through that battlefield on my way up to the border. I saw what I estimated -- over 150 helmets that were still strewn across that battlefield. I saw places where thousands of mortar rounds -- and you could tell, I could tell by what was left there -- had landed in a single location. And it was absolutely amazing to me that in this day and age, just 20 years ago, in a battle out there in the middle of the desert, that possibly 1 million or 1 million for sure and as high as 3 million people could have been killed. There were minefields all over.

I say this because this country has seen a level of violence and suffering over the last 25 to 35 years that we can't even comprehend. I know I can't comprehend losses like that.

The stakes in this fight are particularly high. And we viewed Iraq a certain way prior to February, when the golden dome was bombed. We looked at the attacks being conducted by al Qaeda in a certain way, and in the post time, we've looked with a different lens.

I would just be very, very careful that if we consider the fact that if we're not successful, if the statement of this party leader is true and Iraq would descend into a civil war, the lens we look at and think about the casualties that could occur in that civil war may be totally different than what would really happen, based on recent experiences in this country.

And with that, I thank you very much. Great honor.

MR. WHITMAN: Thank you, General. And I can't emphasize enough and reiterate for the folks in this room how valuable your perspective is and for your support of this series of briefings that we do and making your subordinate commanders available to us also.

Thank you very much.

GEN. CHIARELLI: Well, we appreciate all your support and the support of the folks that are in that room, and we appreciate what they do every single day.

Thank you.

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