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**Presenter: Commander of 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, July 14, 2006 9:15 AM EDT**  
**Colonel Sean B. MacFarland**

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**DoD News Briefing with Col. MacFarland from Iraq**

BRYAN WHITMAN (Pentagon spokesman): Well, good morning, first of all, and thank you for joining us today. We're going to see if we can do this. We've had some technical difficulties and our audio is going to be less than optimal, and if it deteriorates to the point where we can't communicate well, we'll go ahead and reschedule this.

But we do have today with us Colonel Sean MacFarland.

And, Colonel MacFarland, this is Bryan Whitman. Can you hear me okay?

COL. MACFARLAND: Yes I can, Bryan, thanks.

MR. WHITMAN: Very good. Well thanks for sticking with us there as we work through some of those technical difficulties.

Colonel MacFarland is the commander of the 1st Brigade, 1st Armor Division. His brigade operates as part of Multinational Forces West. He is speaking to us today from Ramadi. And this is, I think -- yes, it is -- the first that you've spoken to this group, Colonel. And I'll attest to their tameness this morning. And we'll turn it over to you and let you give us an overview of what your unit is doing, and then open it up for some questions.

COL. MACFARLAND: Okay, great. Thanks.

Well, hello everybody. I'm glad to be with you today. And I'm always happy for the opportunity to tell Americans what a great job their sons and daughters are doing for all Americans over here.

I'd like to begin by saying that this is not just an Army brigade; we are the 1st Brigade of the 1st Armor Division. We like to call ourselves the "Ready First" Combat Team. But we're really composed of all four services -- Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine. We have five battalions from the 1st Armor Division, but we also have a battalion from the 101st Airborne Division; we have a battalion from the 8th Marine Regiment, and we have numerous companies and platoons from the Army and the Marine Corps, and Navy and Air Force personnel in key supporting and staff positions.

So we're joint; we're combined with two Iraqi army brigades. We work with the Iraqi police as well. And

we're interagency. We work with the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and other agencies in the Ramada area as well. So this is a true joint, combined and interagency team.

Geographically, we are in Al Anbar province to the west of Baghdad. My area of operations runs pretty much along the western shores of the three large lakes to the west to the capital. It's about a hundred miles north to south, about 85 miles east to west. The Euphrates River runs through the center of it. And Ramadi is the major urban center. Population-wise, it's about 600,000 people all tolled, two-thirds of which live in and around the city of Ramadi.

And the population is homogeneous for the most part, subtribes, the Dulaimis, Arabs and Sunni. So we don't have great sectarian subsets or groups in this area of operations.

As some of you may know, my brigade did not start out in Ramadi, we started up in Tall Afar in the West Ninevah Province, in January, and we moved down here in June. And we took some of the lessons that we learned up in Ramadi (sic) and have applied them to this area of operations to help us hit the ground running. But of course, we've had to adapt because each area is unique and we try to conform with local realities.

Our mission since the 11th of June has been to partner with the Iraqi security forces and to conduct combined counterinsurgency operations to neutralize the enemy and to set the conditions for the transfer of security operations to the Iraqi security forces, and also to support the transfer of governance to provincial control out here in Al Anbar, Ramadi being the capital of the province.

The key tasks when I got down here, I assessed, were first to form a team, which I think we've done. Secondly, we had to set the conditions for victory, first by isolating Ramadi from enemy resupply and reinforcements, and then, of course, to prepare the Iraqi security forces for the challenges ahead, which is essential. The side that wins a war of this nature is the side that can keep fighting a day longer than their opponent. The ISF is certainly willing to -- they are in the fight to the finish, but we have to make sure that they are self-sustaining and capable of keeping that fight up for as long as they have to.

Third, we have to fight the enemy. And we recognize that the key terrain in this battlespace is not the city of Ramadi or the Euphrates River, it's the people that live here. To that end, we use a combination of lethal and non-lethal means to defeat the insurgency. Our approach was best articulated, I think, by John Locke some 300 years ago when he said, "Be sociable with those that will be sociable, and formidable with them that will not." So although Ramadi is a violent place, we're only as violent as we need to be, and not a bit more.

Finally, we have to consolidate our gains. Here again, the ISF is critical to our success. Not only is it difficult for us as Americans to stay here long enough to ensure that the peace that we gain is secure, but no matter how hard we Americans try, we'll always be perceived as outsiders here, and we'll never be as accessible to the Iraqi people as their own institutions, particularly this -- the police and the army.

So our own doctrine says that the tenants of counterinsurgency fighting are perseverance and legitimacy, and the Iraqi security forces provide us with that instrument to satisfy both of those fundamentals.

My campaign plan? We're pursuing these objectives along four lines of operation.

First of all, development of the ISF. I've talked about that.

Secondly, conducting security operations, and that'll eventually transition first to the Iraqi army in the lead and then to the Iraqi police in the lead.

And then civil military operations, which include both government and economic initiatives.

And finally, information ops. And those are designed to separate the enemy from the Iraqi people and to help reintegrate former insurgents back into mainstream society.

So how's it going? Well, pretty well overall. As you know, Ramadi is one of the active seats of the insurgency, and over the past month, we've conducted a series of operations to clear, then hold and then build various sections of Ramadi and its immediate environs. We've successfully interdicted the enemy as far as infiltration into the city, and we've established five new combined coalition and Iraqi security force combat outposts and patrol bases both in and around the city. These have had a very disruptive effect on the enemy. Most importantly, though, it's given us the opportunity to engage the people of Ramadi, instead of just to -- the sights of our weapons but an actual conversation. And we've established real relationships with the people in parts of the city that we hadn't been able to in the past.

These atmospheres around these combat outposts has been changing from hostile to neutral and neutral to good, but in some places it's moving faster than others. It's a process, and it's going in the right direction, but we still have a way to go.

Once people in these -- near these new combat outposts and patrol bases understand that the Iraqi security forces are there to stay and they're not just sweeping through the neighborhoods, they begin to open up a little bit more and provide us both with intelligence, and they start to talk to us about their concerns, their needs and their desires that we can then address, and that turns us into the building phase, where we start to first to establish some short-term projects to help the immediate the problems in the area and then try to develop economic growth conditions.

In time, American presence will diminish at these patrol bases, and eventually it'll just be Iraqi army working with the Iraqi police, and then finally, the ITs will have the lead.

Okay, so, I talked enough. I'll be happy to answer any questions you might have now.

MR. WHITMAN: Well, thanks, Colonel, and we'll get right into it. And hopefully you can indulge us for a little bit past our point in time, and we'll get about 15 minutes of questions here.

Go ahead, Will.

Q Colonel, this is Will Dunham with Reuters.

Are you confident that Ramadi can be pacified without the type of ground offensive that was used in 2004 in Fallujah?

And also, could you just tell us how many U.S. troops are in the Ramadi area?

COL. MACFARLAND: Yeah, Will, I am confident that we can secure Ramadi without a Fallujah-type offensive. And with each new section of Ramadi that we move into and establish a patrol base and begin to move out into the neighborhoods, I become more and more confident that a Fallujah-type of offensive is not going to be necessary, certainly not across the entire city. I mean, there's always the chance the enemy may establish a final redoubt that has to be reduced by force. And if necessary, we'll be formidable with them that will not be sociable. But we will try to diminish the numbers of the insurgency through our non-lethal means to avoid that.

I'd rather not get into total number of troops in the area for operational reasons.

MR. WHITMAN: Tom.

Q Colonel, Tom Bowman with National Public Radio. You mentioned how you want to prepare the Iraqi security forces for the challenges ahead and to make them self-sustaining. Could you elaborate on that a little bit? We all know that it's going to take time for them to get their logistics up and running. Will you have to leave a number of U.S. troops behind to help with that self-sustainment? Just a little more detail on that, please.

COL. MACFARLAND: Sure. Thanks, Tom. Well, you know, with the Iraq security forces we have our Military Transition Teams and our Police Transition Teams that are working with them embedded with them. And they are the ones that are really the backbone of ensuring that the self-sustainment catches on and eventually carries through, even without American presence. So as the combat forces here are reduced, the MiTT teams and PTT teams, as we call them, will continue to work hand in glove with the Iraqi security forces. And I'm confident that we'll get there.

You know, the Iraqis are challenged right now in some of their logistical areas, personnel, administration areas. But you have to keep in mind that this is an army that's being formed in contact with the enemy, and that's never an easy process. I mean, our own army was formed in the midst of a conflict in the Revolutionary War. And as you -- many -- as I'm sure you all recall, the Continental Army went through a pretty tough time at Valley Forge. And if it wasn't for outsiders -- the French army and a Prussian general named Baron von Steuben -- who knows, we might all be speaking English today. (Laughter.)

MR. WHITMAN: Pam.

Q Thanks. Colonel, this is Pam Hess with UPI.

I've got a ton of questions, but just a big-picture one: Can you explain to us why Ramadi continues to be such a problem? I think even since the start of the war, Ramadi has been the single most dangerous place for U.S. troops. What is it about this place that makes it so intractable? And why do you think -- because it sounds like you think that you're going to be the one that's going to be able to turn this around, or your men are going to be able to turn this around.

COL. MACFARLAND: Well, first of all, it's not just me that's going to turn this around, it's going to be the great soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines that are out here, and, of course, the Iraqi security forces. And the people of Ramadi will turn it around themselves. The people of Ramadi have historically not responded well to higher authority. They didn't get along well with Saddam. They weren't particularly fond of the Brits. And, you know, we Americans are perceived as outsiders as well. And that's just a fact of life. That's just the local culture here. It's insular.

This has been exacerbated by al Qaeda when they moved in here. They intimidated, through murder and other acts of violence, the people of Ramadi and forced them into their homes, away from their places of employment, and really have turned Ramadi into a battleground. And now that we are beginning to reintroduce the Iraqi security forces into the city and establish the secure conditions for people to come back out of their homes and begin productive employment, the tide is beginning to shift.

But it's a slow process. And this has been going south for a while; it's going to take a while to turn it around to head north again. But I see the change, and it's happening every day.

Q To be clear -- it's Pam again -- the change, then, for you is the fact that you're getting enough ISF finally into Ramadi that you can put an Iraqi face on security?

COL. MACFARLAND: Absolutely. Success begets success. And as the security situation improves, as administration of the Iraqi security forces improve and we're able to pay them on time, people are able to stay under arms and with their colors and continue to serve and protect, that helps a lot. And then that helps us with our recruiting efforts. And as we create secure areas, these ink spots that grow larger and larger and begin to

connect, people don't have to worry about the safety of their families when they go out and either work with the Iraqi security forces or find some other form of employment. And that creates a kind of a snowball effect.

And we're, I think, approaching the take off point where this will become a self-sustaining phenomenon and will achieve irreversible momentum.

Q Colonel, Jeff Schogol with Stars and Stripes. You were talking about some of the lessons from Tall Afar. Do you plan to berm Ramadi and then do selective strikes like Operation Restoring Rights as in Tall Afar?

COL. MACFARLAND: No, I don't plan to build a berm around the city of Ramadi. There are a number of roads in here. We've put checkpoints on the roads. If you look at the map, Ramadi's surrounded on two sides by a river and on one side by a railroad embankment. So it really doesn't need a berm around it. All we had to do was control the entry control points, as we call them, and we did. So no, I'm not going to build a wall around the city.

And Operation Restoring Rights was a great success up in Tall Afar, but each area's a little bit different, and Ramadi's a little bit different from Tall Afar and it's different from Fallujah. And the approach that we're taking now -- clearing, holding and building one neighborhood at a time -- is the approach we'll stay with, and it's bearing fruit and I don't see a reason to change it at this time.

Q Colonel, David Curley (sp) from ABC News. You mentioned your ISF. We've seen some issues with where particular forces come from. Can you give us a sense of the make-up of the ISF forces? Are they all Sunni or are they all from that area? Are you having any issues with their interaction with the local populace?

COL. MACFARLAND: That's a great question. The Iraqi police are recruited locally, and they are the sons of Ramadi and the districts around it. And that gives them instant cache with the people who live here, and they have mutual respect. And of course, they know who the local players and characters are, and that makes them more effective at their job.

The Iraqi army is recruited nationally, and they're an ethnic mix -- Kurd, Shi'a, Sunni. I don't have the exact percentages. We don't put too fine a point on that because quite frankly it doesn't matter; it's a national army just as ours is a national army. And it's just not something that we discuss a lot.

Q Colonel, Gordon Trowbridge from Army Times. Previous units that have been in Ramadi have spent a lot of time and attention focused on the government center in the city. I wonder if you could tell me a little bit about what your troops are doing there, the security situation around there, and also, whether you've been able to make any progress in getting the provincial government in any sort of functional form.

COL. MACFARLAND: Well, well, thanks. That's a good question, too.

The government center is in a pretty tough part of town, and the 3rd Battalion of the 8th Marines had done a great job of securing it. Right now, over the course of the years, the -- about a dozen buildings around the government center have become really little more than shells of buildings and don't serve any purpose other than to hide snipers and IED triggermen. So we're going to begin the process of rejuvenating the center of the city around the government center by, you know, taking those buildings down and creating a clear space around the city center -- around the government center.

That will increase the security. That will help the government workers feel safer about coming to work, and that will help in turn get the provincial government accelerating towards control in the province. And, you know, people will sometimes liken that to destroying a village in order to save it; absolutely nothing of the sort. These buildings are already destroyed, and what we're really doing is accelerating the urban renewal and rejuvenation of Ramadi by just taking them down.

Q Colonel, I'm Carl Osgood with Executive Intelligence Review. There's been a number of stories recently about troops coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan with mental health problems. I'm wondering, how much of an issue is combat stress for you and your troops, and what kind of measures are you taking to deal with it?

COL. MACFARLAND: Well, well, thanks for that question. Combat stress is something that we are very concerned about, and whenever a unit suffers a loss -- which occurs all too frequently, unfortunately -- we immediately put a combat stress team, which -- we have organic teams of brigades down with that unit. They spend a few times, and they talk to the soldiers and work with them. And, of course, we all have our unit chaplains as well who do a terrific job.

So we do the immediate, on-the-scene counseling and working with the units, helping them to overcome the stages of grief and get them back into the fight, and at the same time setting the long-term conditions for their sustained mental health.

MR. WHITMAN: Back to you, Pam.

Q Thanks. It's Pam Hess again. Two questions. On your ISF, what kind of AWOL rates are you facing, particularly with the Iraqi army? You -- Anbar province, in my experience, has had sort of historically high compared to other areas, and so if you could also norm it for us, but what's kind of normal for you and where do they stand?

And also, periodically we hear reports of in-fighting between Iraqi insurgents and al Qaeda in Iraq, within Ramadi particularly.

Would you talk to us about that; how much of that you see, if any; if it's a growing trend; or what seems to spark it?

COL. MACFARLAND: Okay. On the AWOL rate for the Iraqi security forces, no, it's not particularly high. They have a leave, train, operate cycle, like all Iraqi security forces do. And I'll tell you, I mean, you know, people need to understand that the Iraqi security forces here in Al Anbar Province, in Ramadi in particular, are in a tough fight, and yet they're sticking with it. And as long as they continue to be fed and paid and trained and equipped as they should be -- and they are -- they're staying with their units. And you know, I think -- well, I draw a lot of encouragement from that, and I think everybody else should, too.

On the red-on-red violence, as we call it, the insurgents fighting each other, it's easy to make more of that than there really is. Some of it happens. But you have about four different flavors of bad guys out there.

You have the foreign fighter, al Qaeda guys. They're very few in number, although as far as we can tell, they constitute about 100 percent of the suicide bombers. Sometimes it's tough to tell after a suicide bombing what exactly the suicide guy's nationality was, for obvious reasons, but when we can tell, they tend to be foreign fighters.

Then you have your local AQ sympathizers, but they're also relatively small in number, but they are a very lethal part of the insurgency here.

And then the vast majority are either the rejectionists, who reject the government of Iraq for various either ethnic or political reasons; or you have just the organized criminal element that's out there.

And sometimes those four groups will fight over the same resources or fight for influence over the same areas, and that's where you see the red-on-red tend to occur.

MR. WHITMAN: All right, let's finish up with Will.

Q Colonel, Will Dunham with Reuters. How long do you anticipate that it will take to bring the city fully under control?

COL. MACFARLAND Well, that's a tough question.

And the key, of course, to ensuring that we consolidate on the objective and secure the city for the long term is going to be the Iraqi security forces. And they're making good progress, and we're committed to helping them get to where they need to be.

I don't want to put a date on it; when that date is actually going to occur, I don't know. I mean, I would just have to guess, and your guess may be as good as mine this morning. But I'm committed to making that as soon as possible for a lot of reasons, obviously. And like I said, I'm encouraged by the progress that I'm seeing out there.

MR. WHITMAN: Colonel, let me turn it back to you for a moment to bring it to a close and see if you have anything you'd like to add before we do that.

COL. MACFARLAND: Thanks, Bryan. Yes, in closing, I'd just like to say that I think we have turned a corner here in Ramadi. There's still a lot to do, but we're on the right track. And to use a golf analogy, I think we struck the ball well, but the follow-through is critical to determine the trajectory of the golf ball. And those of you out there who play golf with me know that, you know, I'm speaking from theory rather than practice. But this is the time that is really critical for us. We're at a transition point in the fight for Ramadi. And we're now at the point where we're beginning to take the city back from the insurgents. And now it's important for us to hold what we've got and to begin to build where we hold.

I've been encouraged by what I've seen. I think the potential for success exists here.

And finally, I just want to say it's been the greatest privilege of my life to command the amazing young soldiers and sailors and airmen and Marines of this brigade. You know, you hear a lot of people talk about the younger generations and they worry about them. And I'd just like to say that something in America is going very right to turn out the kinds of people that I see out here wearing America's uniform. They're courageous, they're disciplined, they're intelligent, and they're positive warriors. They live in spartan living conditions, they're under constant danger, they suffer from extreme heat, they carry heavy loads, and they are under a very demanding tempo, and occasionally they suffer heartbreaking losses.

But each and every day, they get up there, they stand their post, they go out on their patrols, and they do it with resolve, with good cheer, and with compassion for the innocent victims of the war. They're a force for good. They're proud of who they are. They're proud of who they're fighting for, and you can be very proud of them too.

The people of Iraq see this, and to the extent that we can create an Iraqi security force in their image, the people of Iraq will benefit.

Thanks for your time.

MR. WHITMAN: Colonel, thank you very much, and we hope to have you back to talk some time very soon.

COL. MACFARLAND: Thank you very much. Have a great day.