

Today I will provide you with a report on our progress. Before I begin, however, I would just like to say that this is my third tour of duty in Iraq. I was with the 4th Infantry Division during the initial invasion in 2003 and returned again in 2005 as a member of the IED Defeat Task Force. I've seen phenomenal progress in that time. During this tour, for the first time, I've seen Iraqi security forces that can plan, prepare and execute first-class offensive operations. I've also seen a high level of trust and respect by the people of Rashid for their own army and police forces.

The mission of my brigade is to protect the population. We accomplish this by standing shoulder-to-shoulder with our Iraqi security force brothers defending the people of Rashid. Together, we conduct relentless offensive operations designed to kill, capture or drive from Rashid anyone who threatens the safety and security of the people we have sworn to protect. This is a straightforward mission and it translates into hours of backbreaking work in miserable conditions, patrolling alongside our Iraqi counterparts to defeat anti-government forces.

Our hard work and sacrifices have paid off. There's been a measurable improvement in the security in the Rashid district since our arrival here in March. When we arrived, we averaged five attacks per day in the Rashid district. By July, we'd reduced that average to 1.5 attacks per day. As a reference point, in the same security district there were 824 attacks in July of 2007 with a daily average of 27 attacks, making Rashid one of the most dangerous places in Iraq.

I believe this reduction in violence is a direct result of the conditions set by the success of the surge in forces and combat power. We built on this success and have seen a dramatic reduction in violence in the past four months. For example, we have reduced the number of attacks from 122 in April to 48 in July. This represents a 61 percent reduction. The daily attack average was four in April and has been reduced to 1.5 in July. Additionally, there were 18 rocket and mortar attacks in April and only three in July of 2008. This represents an 83 percent decrease. Regarding the IED, there were 69 attacks in April and 37 in July, and this is a 46 percent decrease. When we look at direct-fire attacks, we saw 30 in April and five in July. This represents an 83 percent decrease.

What this reduction in violence in Rashid district has allowed me to do is to shift my focus from kinetic operations to enabling the improvement of essential services and to continue to improve the capabilities of our Iraqi security force partners. It is my firm belief that the decisive defeat of the special group criminals and militias in May and June of this year has opened a window of opportunity for us to make substantial and lasting improvements in the Rashid district.

I would like to talk for just a moment about my Iraqi security force counterparts. I've seen substantial improvement in the performance of the Iraqi security forces. They are well equipped, well led and very aggressive. They performed exceptionally well during offensive operations against the militias. The fact is, the Iraqi security forces are increasingly carrying the load in southern Baghdad.

In partnership with Iraqi security forces, our forces have detained 56 al Qaeda in Iraq operatives in the past four months. We continue to pursue them relentlessly. We have captured more than 170 special group criminals associated with the Jaish al-Mahdi militia. Intelligence reporting indicates that these criminals have received reports -- support from elements in Iran. Our task now is to exploit the opportunities provided by these operations and to prevent the enemies of Iraq from returning to make life miserable for the good people of Rashid.

Seizing on the improved security conditions, we are pursuing reconstruction progress -- projects to improve the quality of life for the Iraqi people. To date, we have completed 22 projects valued at more than \$5 million. Currently, we are managing 78 active projects valued at more than \$45 million. We've also proposed an additional 117 projects valued at more than \$26 million. Each product -- project is coordinated with the Rashid district council leadership to ensure that we are meeting the needs of the people. I'm very proud of the work my