

MR. WHITMAN: Go ahead.

Q Colonel, my name is David Morgan. I'm with Reuters News Agency. You say that there were 42 attacks in July. Can you rank for us, please, the threats that you face in terms of the actors that are taking part in these attacks? And when you say that you've shifted away from kinetic operations, does that mean that you're making progress towards an -- becoming an overwatch operation as opposed to a combat operation?

COL. MARTIN: I didn't understand the first part of your question. I'm sorry.

Q Can you rank the threats that you are facing in Rashid district in terms of the groups that you are seeing carry out attacks?

COL. MARTIN: Sure. That's a fair question. If I was ranking the attacks, the number one threat to my soldiers and to my partners in the Iraqi security forces are improvised explosive devices emplaced by special group criminals who operate as part of the illegal militias in Baghdad.

Q What's their motive? What are they trying to achieve?

COL. MARTIN: Well, I think it's clear they're trying to destabilize the government of Iraq as they continue to build capacity and capability here. I think they want to undermine the government, and they're using the neighborhoods of Rashid as a battlefield. I'm pretty confident that we've denied them that capability. Just looking at the types of attacks that the -- that my soldiers and my counterparts in the Iraqi security forces face, they've dwindled in weeks. And a lot of that is due to the aggressive actions of both my soldiers and the Iraqi security forces.

When I say kinetic operations, I mean offensive patrolling designed to interdict the enemy either in placing their improvised explosive devices, discovering their caches -- or the caches, and disrupting them in their meeting places, a variety of different ways we do that. But the best way we do that is we get tips from the local people. The biggest ally I have on the battlefield today are the people of Iraq. They provide us great intelligence, and that is played out in the number of raids, denial patrols that we conduct to keep the enemy from -- able to influence a particular area. And since May and June, we've seen that dwindle to almost -- you know, to the low numbers that you see now. Make no mistake, they're still a threat to my soldiers and to my Iraqi security force counterparts, but there's been tremendous progress made in just the last four months. I am -- I couldn't be happier with the performance of my soldiers and my Iraqi security force counterparts.

MR. WHITMAN: Let's just go one, two, three -- (off mike).

Q Yeah. This is Kernan Chaisson with Forecast International. The GAO has talked about the MRAP program, saying that in order to get the vehicles to the field, multiple manufacturers were used, and as a result, there's the potential for problems with maintenance, sustainability, training and that sort of thing. Has your unit received its full complement of MRAPs? Are they all from the same company? And have you experienced any problems as a result of them being so new?

COL. MARTIN: Sure. I'm in a heavy brigade combat team. My primary mode of transportation on the battlefield are tanks, Bradleys and howitzers.

We do have our fair share of MRAPs. I think they're fantastic pieces of equipment. I currently have 136 MRAPs. There are, I think, three or four different varieties. Just like there's different varieties of humvees, there's different varieties of MRAPs. We have some of the larger troop-carrying ones and some of the smaller versions. My operational readiness rate is -- maintained over 90 percent since I arrived in country, and I don't see that falling off. There's not a reliability problem with the MRAPs.