

Q Hi, General. This is Courtney Kube from NBC News. You mentioned earlier you had about 80 Georgian troops in your area that have since left. Could you give us a better idea of what sorts of troops they were, what kind of missions they had? And then also, you mention that the withdrawal of the Georgian troops would affect MND- Central. Despite the fact that's not your area, could you give us a little better idea of what you meant by that, what specific impact do you see that having?

GEN. HERTLING: Yeah. Well, talking to Mike Oates the other night -- first I'll answer your first question. The 80 troops that we have in this area, much like the rest of the Georgian brigade, are primarily infantrymen. That's what they trained on, in Tbilisi, or the training area outside Tbilisi. So the entire brigade is an infantry brigade.

It's not as big as one of our infantry brigades, but it's pretty capable. One of their companies was with the unit that came up to help us in the Diyala operations. They were split apart from their brigade. In fact, they are split across several brigades, so General Oates, quite frankly, is pulling them all together right now to get them redeployed back to Tbilisi.

You know, I don't want to talk more about it, because I don't know -- quite frankly, I don't know how he was using them in the Multinational Division Center area. That might be a question to ask him, or maybe General Austin. But I do know they were contributing to security operations down there just as they were up here.

Q Sir, this is Jim Garamone from American Forces Press Service. The Kirkuk area, I guess, remains a possible flashpoint. As the Iraqi elections come up, what does this mean to you?

GEN. HERTLING: Yeah. Kirkuk, as you probably saw -- I guess it was about 10 days ago now -- had some violence during a very peaceful demonstration of the election law and hoping to get it passed and maybe taking a look at pulling the (region's law out ?). I don't want to go into the politics of it. But a few -- about 10 days ago, I think it was, they had a suicide vest occur and then some shooting take place at the peaceful demonstration, where several people were killed and many more were wounded.

It is a -- it's a tense area, but I'll tell you quite frankly, we -- I just escorted the minister of Defense, Mr. Abdul Qadir, up there last Sunday, and -- or Monday, I guess it was.

And he took a look around, And he had been hearing rumors from very many people that were calling up saying that Kirkuk was a flashpoint and bad things were about to happen. So he literally flew up there. And I think that's an interesting point, that the government of Iraq is now going out to their provinces to test the waters.

And when he got there and we drove him through town, he found out what all of us that work in Kirkuk saw every day, that it's a very -- it's one of our most peaceful provinces, and peaceful cities, as well. There are some things that happen up there every once in a while. There are still some extremists in the area. But quite frankly, people were in the markets. There were weddings going on in the street when he drove through with us. And he said, boy, this -- you know, all the signs were in Arab, not Kurdish, as he had been told in Baghdad. So he walked away realizing that some of the reports from people that were not there were not quite true.

It is tense. Quite frankly, it is tense, because of the debate over the elections. And that's just something that the Iraqi people will have to work out among themselves, but I have confidence that they will in a peaceful means as long as some of the people don't flare it up with false reporting.

MR. WHITMAN: Andrew.

Q General, this is Andrew Gray from Reuters. Sorry, do you want to add something?

GEN. HERTLING: An interesting vignette, if I could give you an interesting vignette on Kirkuk. I was walking to the brigade commander up there, a guy named Dave Pascal (sp), this morning. And he said, you know, there