

What happened with 2/7 -- and 2/4 MEU, for that matter -- was that it was sort of an impromptu decision. It came when there was concern about a spring offensive. There was concern on the part of the commanders in Afghanistan that the economy of force is not necessarily working as well as we would hope. There was a determination without opportunity to fully train to put those Marines into place. Now again, they've done a magnificent job, by every account and every commander that I've spoken to, to include British.

At this point, we are trying to lean into those types of short-term requirements as much as we can, to the extent that we're sending more units to mountain warfare training, for instance, than we have done in the past. We're changing our training a bit with regard to what takes place in Twentynine Palms, which is our major training facility, so that the forces then can go either way. If they wind up continuing their probable assignment to Iraq, they can certainly manage the functions there. Should they wind up being tasked to go to Afghanistan, they're simply more capable of performing duties there.

Q General, a while ago -- well, not too long ago, an Iraqi commander told us that he didn't want the Iraqis to assume provincial control of Anbar because he was afraid that the U.S. Marines would leave the province. Now you're saying that Anbar is expected to assume provincial Iraqi control in a few days. Can you say what's changed?

GEN. CONWAY: Well, the Iraqis still want us to stay. That was an interesting sort of discussion that I had with, again, their generals and the police chiefs in our discussion. I mentioned to you that we drove the mean streets of Fallujah and Ramadi. That was on the way to meet with the senior Iraqi leadership in the province.

And what they said was a bit of a dichotomy, I'll be the first to admit. They said, you know, we've got it, okay? We can handle all internal threats that now exist in the Anbar province. But we love your Marines and we want you to stay as long as you want to be here. And so, you know, our dialogue was very relaxed and we were even smiling. And we're saying, well, if our job is done, you know, we need to go home. And they said, oh, but we love you and you helped -- you know, you are our best friend and you help represent us to the government and those kinds of things.

So, obviously we can't have it both ways over time, but for now, we have achieved very good relationships with our host in Anbar, and I think we're welcome as long as the determination is that we stay.

Q And is the PIC scheduled for September 1st?

GEN. CONWAY: The PIC is scheduled soon, okay? I don't know that that's been publicly released, and I probably shouldn't do it again as a Title X kind of guy.

Gordon?

Q Sir, if you get the opportunity to not only backfill those Marines in Afghanistan but perhaps (fluff ?) it out more, based on your trip, what is it that you'd like to see them do or what is it do you think that they are going need to be doing that they're not doing now -- what you've got there now aren't doing? But also, what's the strategic win for the Marine Corps to be able to shift from the operations -- the nation-building kind of thing in Iraq to Afghanistan?

GEN. CONWAY: Okay. Okay. A couple of things, Gordon, with regard to what they need to be able to do -- 24 is operating in the -- (inaudible) -- river valley. Again, every indication is that they have effectively closed down that rat line; they have driven the bad guys elsewhere because they just don't want to tangle with the Marines. I mean, I won't quote you casualty counts, but they're hugely disproportionate and the Taliban really took a good bloodying at the hands of 24 MEU.

But it's only -- it's only one sector. You know, it's kind of interesting, the Green Zone in Iraq means one thing. The "green zone" in Afghanistan means something exactly the opposite, because that's where the bad guys are. And these "green zones" are around river valleys where populations occur, crops are grown, drugs are produced and that type of thing, and that's where you find the bad guys. There are lots of "green zones" that at this point we don't have the force structure to get to in the Helmand province and in RC South.