

And again, I don't really have any numbers for you. We get this reporting as we do our questioning of the detainees. And as I said, really, what we're facing here just in the Madain -- I'm not speaking for the rest of Iraq -- are those two organizations, acronyms JAI and JAM special groups.

MR. WHITMAN: Joe.

Q Yeah, sir, this is Joe Tabet with Al Hurra. Yesterday, General James Conway said that the Iraqis in the Anbar province want the Americans to stay. Do you agree with that? And do you feel the same thing in your area?

COL. WHITE: Yeah, Joe, I'll tell you, we have really developed a relationship with the Iraqi people over five years. In our short time here -- over four months -- we truly have befriended a number of Iraqis in the Madain. Whether they want us to stay or not, as we go around, they're very appreciative of our efforts. As I mentioned earlier, we're still committed to providing them security and interdicting the accelerants that move along some of our major avenues of approach into Baghdad.

I absolutely believe that the Iraqi people will continue to want our presence here as long as there is a need and as long the government of Iraq sees that need for us to be here.

Q Colonel, Jeff Schogol with Stars and Stripes. I've seen reports that the government of Iraq is actually arresting members of the Sons of Iraq. Are you having to deal with any of that in your area?

COL. WHITE: Well, here in the Madain, as I mentioned, we've got 6,000 Sons of Iraq. There's 70 separate contracts, so we have 70 separate Sons of Iraq leaders, per se, that are in charge of the groups that equal 6,000. We have not experienced any warrants or any arrests at this point in time for any of our Sons of Iraq, and I think that really goes back to a question of who reconciled with the government of Iraq and who -- and who did not.

And again, I cannot speak for the government of Iraq and where they generate these warrants from, but at least in the Madain, to this day, as I'm speaking to you, we have not had an issue with Sons of Iraq being arrested by GOI forces.

Q Could you talk about how the -- what progress you're making in either integrating these Sons of Iraq into the security forces or training them for other jobs?

COL. WHITE: Absolutely. And I think this is a common theme across Iraq, but let me talk about specifically in the Madain. Again, I have a pretty low number of Sons of Iraq, and it's -- and it's based on the security situation here and the need for them. We have a number of programs that we transition. The first and most important for us and for the government of Iraq is that transition from Sons of Iraq into either the Iraqi police, the Iraqi army or the Iraqi National Police.

We currently have over 400 packets in with Ministry of Interior to transition Sons of Iraq into the Iraqi police force. Next month we'll begin a recruiting drive again for another 1,000 Iraqi police shurta. Now not all of those will be Sons of Iraq, but it's another opportunity for us to engage the Sons of Iraq. They consistently look at how they can backfill into the Iraqi army with Sons of Iraq after they are recruited and trained.

But that is just one area where we transition Sons of Iraq. Here in Madain we have nine civil service corps projects that are solely employing Sons of Iraq. Most of them are down in the Salman Pak area. I do have two that are in the Jisr Diyala area, and then we have three more that we're looking at for the Nahrawan area, to assist us in providing them the training that is required to seek and gain a sustainable job over time.

There are a number of Iraqi initiatives that will also begin, as we are familiar with it, on the new fiscal year. And as we study and look at those programs, I'll be able to pass along what we think from a percentage-wise that we be able to transition.

But truly we remain committed to the Sons of Iraq. The government of Iraq has also recently said they're very committed to maintaining the Sons of Iraq here in the Madain -- can't speak for the rest of Iraq.