

And so we're looking at all this on a daily basis to see how we can help these young men who have said they are going to be committed to a nation and a young nation and give them the jobs that they need.

And then finally, just to kind of close this out, I want to say, you know, I mentioned this is an agrarian society. They really haven't had the desert blooming in about 30 years out there, and we're working very hard to get water into all these farmlands. I honestly believe that once that is achieved by the government of Iraq, and the farmers begin going back to their fields, that we'll transition more of our Sons of Iraq back into their own homes and back into their own fields to become farmers again.

Q Carl Osgood. I write for Executive Intelligence Review. Could you speak more broadly about Sunni-Shi'a relations, what you see there in your area? Because one of the things we keep -- I keep hearing in Washington is that in spite of the great improvement in security, the underlying political grievances have not been addressed. So I'm wondering what you see in your area on that?

COL. WHITE: Yeah, I think if you could repeat the very first part of your question. You came in very muffled.

Q If you could address the broader issue of Sunni-Shi'a relations, what you see in your area in terms of the relations among the Sunnis and Shi'as.

COL. WHITE: Okay. Yeah, amazingly, here in the Madain -- and maybe it's because everybody is an agricultural-based city, town, mahala that's out here in the Madain -- the relationships between the Sunnis and the Shi'as of the Madain itself are very cordial. And as I mentioned, if you can imagine Nahrawan, which is my northern-most city, is predominantly Shi'a, and then as you move south and you get to Jisr Diyala, as I mentioned, it's about a 50-50 split, with Sunnis and Shi'as living next door to each other. And then, of course, Salman Pak is predominantly Sunni in nature. But they do have about 30 percent Shi'a living in the Salman Pak general region.

So we really haven't seen much of what you would call in the past any way sectarian violence. What we do see is what will continue well into the future -- because this country is based on tribes -- are tribal conflicts, not violent tribal conflicts, but just the traditional, "Those are my goats. No, those are my goats." I mean, that's kind of what you see out here in the Madain.

Q Colonel, it's Luis Martinez with ABC News. You mentioned earlier about the battalion, I think it was, that you sent up north to Diyala for the month of July. How did that affect your operations? And could you have survived -- could you have successfully operated for longer without their continued presence in your sector?

COL. WHITE: That's a great question. I mean, the area that we went into in Balad -- just to the southeast of Balad Ruz was an area that coalition forces have gone into twice over the past couple of years, but we did not leave anybody behind in that particular area. And so General Hertling, the commander of 1st Armored Division, asked General Oates, the commander of 10th Mountain, because we border and our boundaries touch 1st Armored Division, if we could do a combined operation.

We were able to pull a battalion minused from the 8th Iraqi Army, which is to my south, to conduct those combined operations with us. We air assaulted the Iraqi army battalion in with us at night. They conducted operations side-by-side with us for almost four weeks, and I was truly amazed by their performance and their persistence out in the Balad Ruz area. It was quite a successful operation, at least from our point of view, in attacking that support zone of AQI.

But in general, we really could have pulled back had we had more Iraqi security forces and allowed them to completely take the lead in this operation. Unfortunately, in this area there were no Iraqi army forces, and so what we did was we just did side-by-side combined operations.

When we left, though, I just want you to know that the 5th Iraqi Army did place a battalion into the area, so we now have persistence -- persistent presence in that area, which prevents AQI from receding after we spent three to four weeks out there with offensive operations.