



Updated 13 Jun 2003

NEWS



[About News](#)

[DoD News](#)

[Advisories](#)

[Contracts](#)

[Live Briefings](#)

[Photos](#)

[Releases](#)


[Slides](#)

[Speeches](#)

[Today in DoD](#)

[Transcripts](#)


[American Forces News](#)

[Articles](#)

[Radio](#)

[Television](#)

[Special Reports](#)

[Search](#)

[News Archive](#)

[News by E-mail](#)


United States Department of Defense

News Transcript

 On the web: <http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2003/tr20030613-0275.html>

Media contact: +1 (703) 697-5131

Public contact: <http://www.dod.mil/faq/comment.html> or +1 (703) 428-0711**Presenter:** Army Lt. Gen. David McKiernan

Friday, June 13, 2003 - 8:00 a.m. EDT

Coalition Joint Task Force Seven Commander Live Briefing from Baghdad

(Video-teleconference briefing on post-war stabilization efforts in Iraq and his upcoming transfer of authority from Baghdad, Iraq. Participating was Army Lt. Gen. David McKiernan, commander of Coalition Joint Task Force Seven. Also participating was Bryan Whitman, deputy assistant secretary of defense for public affairs (media operations).)

Whitman: General, looks like we've got a good picture; hopefully we've got some good audio.

Welcome, Pentagon press corps and thank you for joining us so early this morning. As all of you know, Lt.Gen. David McKiernan is joining us from Baghdad this morning. This may be his last videoconference as the commander of CJTF7, but I'll let him talk to you about that a little bit. (Coughs.) Excuse me.

Again, we appreciate you spending some time with us, especially given that the temperature is 114 degrees out there in Baghdad today. With that, though, since we have a good link, let's go ahead and get started. And sir, I think you may have a few words before we get into the questions.

McKiernan: Well, ladies and gentlemen, good morning. I'm pleased to join you here. Can you hear me okay? (Pause.)

Whitman: We do have good audio.

[Other News](#)
[Sources](#)

McKiernan: Okay. What I would like to do is just spend a minute and give you my assessment on security operations here in Iraq and then I'll be happy to take your questions.

What I've done from the very beginning when we completed the decisive combat operations part of this campaign, I've generally broken up Iraq into a south sector, which is the First Marine Expeditionary Force with the UK division under its command, and then the center of Iraq, the northern part of Iraq and then Baghdad, Baghdad and the center and northern part of Iraq being under U.S. Army Fifth Corps. And how I would characterize these different zones as we sit here today: first of all, in the south, the south is permissive, it's been declared permissive by UNSECORD and I think things are generally secure, although there are still pockets of subversive elements that we find and have to deal with over time. There are still those in the south who would work against the coalition, and so there'll be some continuing flare-ups at different parts of the south.

The other thing to remember about the southern part of Iraq is it has the poorest state of infrastructure anywhere in Iraq. It was neglected by the regime of Saddam Hussein for years and years, and so bringing quality of life actions back up to a standard that we feel is acceptable will continue to take much work. But I would tell you that in quality of life and in electricity, in water treatment plants, in re-hiring police, in sanitation and medical coverage, the trends are all up and very positive in the south. Many places are at standards that exceed pre-war.

In the north part of Iraq -- and that is generally the area up around Mosul, Tolifar and the previous Kurdish autonomous zone -- we call that semi-permissive: great progress there, a lot of businesses are reopening, a lot of commerce happening, but again there are some Ba'athists, residual cells in that area that we will continue to develop intelligence on and go and apprehend or destroy. But I think generally all the trends in the north are going in the right direction as well.

In the central part of Iraq, we have currently two what I would call hot spots that you're well aware of: one is to the west of Baghdad, out of the Fallujah-Ar Ramadi corridor. We have, over the last couple of weeks, moved forces from the 3rd Infantry Division into that area and are aggressively conducting patrols and raids and developing intelligence. And over the last few days, that area has quieted significantly. We're also continue (sic) to make contact with tribal sheiks and local interim governance to try to bring security to that area.

The other hot spot is north of Baghdad, and that's an area we call the peninsula, which is slightly northeast of the city of Balad, where we've been conducting an operation under Fifth Corps and the 4th Infantry Division over the last two or three days called Operation Peninsula Strike. And based on some confirmed intelligence, we've gone in and conducted some search and cordon operations and some raids, which we've detained over 400 Iraqis -- many of them, though, we've released in short order because they did not have any intelligence value, they just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. But we do have over 50 Iraqis that we still have in our hands that we are moving over to our confinement facility here in Baghdad, and we'll do some further interrogations on.

That operation continues. And as recently as last night, we had some actions against part of our forces in that area, and the battalion that was engaged pursued those forces, made contact with them and killed over 20 of them. And so there's going to be some continued operations in that area north of Baghdad.

In Baghdad itself, all the signs and the indicators that I see are moving in the right direction. I would tell you that as I travel around and talk to units and walk the streets of Baghdad, in some cases now I'm seeing where income is not just going for food and the essentials, that in some cases income now is going to repair business establishments. There are more and more businesses, restaurants, cafes, transportation running in Baghdad. The police force is growing in numbers. And next week, under Ambassador Bremer's office, there will be a training, a police academy training program initiated here in Baghdad.

So we are dealing with some hot spots. I will tell you that there are still those that are loyal to a regime that is no longer in power; that we will continue to have to seek out, close with, and either apprehend them or destroy them, and that will take some time. It is still a combat operation, but it takes on, as you can imagine, a significantly different nature than the decisive combat operations which have ended.

And lastly, today is D-plus 86 in this campaign. And as I've told many, when I look at where we're at 86 days after crossing the border in Kuwait, I am -- I think it's a remarkable achievement of where we're at right now, given the fact that those 86 days were preceded by 30 years of terrorism, brutality, a completely oppressive and repressive regime that took all the rich resources of Iraq and plowed them back into regime residences and military and did not invest those resources into the people of Iraq. So I think where we're at right now, and the pride that I have in all the soldiers and Marines that are out there on point conducting all these activities is very remarkable.

So with that quick snapshot, I'd be happy to open it up to your questions.

Whitman: Please identify yourself and your news organization.

Q: Hi. General, this is Matt Kelley with the Associated Press. Could you please fill us in on some more of the details of the operation -- I think it was a day or two ago -- on the -- what was described as a terrorist training camp? There's some indication that that might have been al Qaeda sympathizers. Could you give us some more information on that and what exactly happened and what the result is?

McKiernan: Yes, I'll give you some information, but it won't be enough to quench your thirst on it. There was a camp location out in the western part of Iraq. We had good, actionable intelligence on it, and we struck it very decisively and very lethally the night before last, with both air and ground elements. And I will not go into specifically the battle damage assessment from that site, because, as you can imagine, as we exploit that target, that might lead us to new intel that we can use for actions elsewhere.

But I will just simply tell you that it was a camp area that was confirmed with bad guys, and specifically who the bad guys are will be determined as we exploit the site. We struck it very lethally, and we're exploiting whatever intelligence value we can get from that site for future operations.

Q: General, Brian Hartman with ABC News. Just to follow up on that, CENTCOM announced this morning that the -- and I believe this is a different raid; correct me if I'm wrong -- the 173rd Airborne apprehended 74 suspected al Qaeda sympathizers near Kirkuk. Can you tell us anything about how you believe or understand that these are al Qaeda sympathizers, what you think they were doing there, where they're being held or have been moved to?

McKiernan: Well, and that is -- first of all, that is a different operation up in the vicinity of Kirkuk. There was a raid conducted. I think it's premature to be able to tell you whether they were -- had any ties to al Qaeda. And as we always do, as we apprehend suspected either terrorists or regime holdouts, we'll go through a series of screening interrogations and decide what we have. But I couldn't confirm to you right now that those were all al Qaeda-linked persons.

Q: Hi, General. This is Eric Rosenberg with Hearst Newspapers. Could you quantify for us the degree of assistance you are receiving from the average Iraqi citizens in locating weapon stashes and former members of Hussein's inner circle? And secondly, can you inventory for us the information, the types of information that Iraqis are bringing forward on what they believe to be weapons of mass destruction or location of weapons of mass destruction or information about weapons of mass destruction?

McKiernan: First of all, I think each week there's a growing trend in information and intelligence provided by Iraqi people themselves. Now, we always have to be very balanced on how we approach that information because it could range anywhere from "Let me tell you this about somebody that I don't like so that you go act on them," to actually very good, actionable intelligence on either persons or locations of, as you said, weapons or ammo caches.

So I do see increasingly a willingness in many different areas in Iraq of information being provided by Iraqis who want to achieve the right level of law and order and stability in their country and get on with the recovery of Iraq.

In terms of weapons of mass destruction, because that was such a secretive program over the years and I think the circle of Iraqis who know anything about that program is so much smaller, that that sort of information is much rarer. And as we do get that or as we interrogate those who we have in our custody, we develop intel leads and follow up on each and every one of them very rigorously.

Q: Hi, General. Eric Westervelt, National Public Radio. Can you talk about the security situation in Fallujah? And has the deployment of the Spartan Brigade of the 3rd ID had any

demonstrable impact on the security situation there? And what remains your biggest security challenges in that area?

McKiernan: Well, I think it has had a large impact. When you have presence of coalition forces in that size, I think it's going to have a very positive impact. Now, the difficulty with all these situations is, in many cases you have those that don't actually live in that area that will come in and use that as a base of operations or use it as an area to conduct attacks or snipings at coalition forces. So you have to be very careful and very methodical how you go through that area, to separate out the bad guys from those that are innocent and just live in that area. But I would tell you that the impact of that brigade combat team has been felt out in Fallujah. It's been fairly quiet the last couple of days. I would hesitate to predict it will stay that way forever, but it's been quiet for the last couple of days, and it's been a success.

Q: General, George Edmonson from Cox Newspapers. We heard a lot before the war about a large number of Saddam Hussein's palaces with supposed links to military uses and extensive bunker systems. Can you tell us how many of those palaces you've been through and what you've found, particularly with the underground bunker systems?

McKiernan: Yes. I think -- and generally speaking, we've been through just about all those palaces around -- at least, around the Baghdad area and up in the Tikrit area. Many of those were looted before U.S. forces arrived on the scene. Some of them did have tunnel complexes under them. Thus far, we have not found anything that I would call usually significant in any of these tunnel complexes. We have found some documents that are being exploited; we found some weapons. But we have gone into some of the underground tunnel networks here in Baghdad and made sure they were clear, and we'll continue to do that. But most of -- generally speaking, most of these palace sites, there was some extensive looting done in these areas before forces, coalition forces, took control of it.

Q: General, this is Carl Osgood with Executive Intelligence Review. Are you concerned at all that these operations that you're conducting in the north and west of Baghdad, that there might be any backlash from the civilian population as a result of the way you're conducting these operations? And secondly, can you -- in that vein, can you say a little bit about how you're operating to avoid -- to minimize the impact on that population?

McKiernan: Yes, I'd be happy to address that. There is always the risk of, when you go in and do an operation like a cordon and search, that you end up apprehending some that live in that area that are truly innocent of any wrongdoing, that don't have any information that will help you find the bad guys. And so, you release them. You do run the risk that their feelings towards the coalition forces might not be the same as they were before that happened.

So what's very important on these operations is that we, hand in hand with our military combat forces, come in with civil affairs- oriented resources and provide projects and opportunities to -- for the Iraqis to fix up their living areas and schools, bridges, water purification plants, businesses, et cetera. So there is a very synchronized effort between the military and the Office of the Coalition Provisional Authority and Ambassador Bremer's

folks to make sure that we go in afterwards and are able to provide civil-military operation support to those areas.

Q: General, this is Jim Wolfe from Reuters. You spoke about your interrogation of the people in custody, and the resultant leads. I wonder if you can tell us whether anybody in custody has given you reason to believe that there were active WMD programs before the war, recently, and whether any of those interrogations have led you to suspect that things are still hidden.

McKiernan: Well, even if there were no interrogations, I would tell you personally I think there's a lot still hidden, that it will take time for us to uncover and develop the intelligence on. It would be premature for me to tell you exactly what leads are coming from interrogations of those that might have been involved with these programs. But I'll tell you I think we -- as I've said repeatedly, I think we have a ways to go, and it will take some time to uncover WMD in a country that's spent years and years and years perfecting their techniques of hiding it.

Q: Sorry. Just to follow up, you said you thought it would premature to say what leads are coming. Are you getting leads, though, that suggest that there were active programs in the months leading up to the invasion?

McKiernan: We get -- from some interrogations, we get information that leads us to another source, that we have to go locate certain facilities and go in there and check those out and see where it leads us. But there is a discussion -- I'm not going to go into the details, but there is discussion from both the chemical and the biological side that leads us to intelligence that we have to go confirm or deny.

Q: Yes, General, this is Vince Crawley with the Army Times Newspapers. You indicated you have some troops who are coming up on 90 days of sustained combat operations. At what point do they get so exhausted that they lose their combat effectiveness? And when are you going to start to need to look for something like unit rotations?

McKiernan: Well, I have units that have been over here far longer than 90 days. My own headquarters has been over here on and off for two years, through both Afghanistan and Iraqi operations. I'm not worried about our units and our soldiers losing their combat edge. Their leadership will make sure that that does not happen. There does become a point in time where the equipment needs to be pulled out and regenerated, maintained. And there is a time where forces need to be rotated. We do have plans, but they're all conditions-based. It depends on what the enemy does.

But right now, we have -- because I know you're probably going to ask me this, too -- we have sufficient forces to accomplish the mission over here. And when conditions warrant, we will replace some of those forces, either with other U.S. forces or with multinational contributions.

Q: Hi, General. Scott Foster with NBC News here. You mentioned that over 20 Iraqis were killed in the operation last night. I'm wondering if you can tell us about how many Iraqis were involved total in this engagement?

McKiernan: No, I couldn't. It was -- it took place during the hours of darkness. How many more were involved, I couldn't tell you.

Q: Sir, Brian Hartman with ABC News again. Just a follow-up on a question earlier. Do you have a sense that at the end of this summer, maybe into the fall or in the winter, that the 3rd Infantry Division will still be in Iraq?

McKiernan: I'm not going to predict a date that the 3rd Infantry Division won't be in Iraq. I'm going to tell you that military actions combined with economic recovery and political governance -- in other words, Iraqi institutions being stood back up and more Iraqis in charge of things like policing, ministries, a new Iraqi army, et cetera, all those things will work together to determine what's the right force presence over here, in addition to multinational contributions. So please don't try to pin me down on a date that the 3rd Infantry Division's going to redeploy, because I don't know that yet. It's conditions-based, and the leaders in the division understand that there's still a mission going on, and when the time is right, they'll redeploy their forces.

Q: Sir, just to follow on. This is a challenge that's going to be facing your successor, if you could talk a little bit about that. And also, could you tell me, is it fair to say that you're not going to be able to relieve the 3rd ID and the 101st folks until you get some commitments from the international community? I mean, are you able to relieve them from inside the Army, or do you really need somebody from one of our allied countries to pony up some forces before you can send them home?

McKiernan: Well, I think first of all, that will be determined back in -- by the secretary and COMCENT on how that balance of forces will work. But yes, they could be rotated with other army forces, conceivably. Yes, they could be rotated with multinational forces. And yes, they could -- we could reduce the number of forces over here based on the security situation and progress in those other two pillars, the economy and Iraqi self-governance. So all of those conditions have to be assessed over time.

Q: Sir, to follow up on the operations, you've said the battle damage assessment is ongoing and you're not sure how many Iraqi forces you face. But could you characterize the level of resistance at the suspected training camp? What kind of resistance were your forces met with, and what kind of armament or what kind of tools was the enemy using to put up that resistance?

McKiernan: Well, again, I'm not going to go into those details because we're still exploiting the site and developing some intelligence that we might be able to use in the immediate future, so I don't want to divulge any of that. I will just tell you that it was a superbly planned and executed operation with both air and ground forces, and the element of surprise was on

our side. And it was conducted very decisively.

Q: General, this is Lisa Burgess with Stars and Stripes. When your authority -- the authority is getting transferred over to General Sanchez in a couple of days. Can you tell us, what type of advice will you give him, and suggestions for priorities in this transfer?

McKiernan: Well, we have a very detailed plan where we -- what we call right seat ride. So, I have many elements of my headquarters that have been working with the 5th Corps headquarters for some time, and we'll continue to work with them for the next couple of weeks or as long as it takes so there's really a seamless transfer of authority. And then after that happens, I'm in support of General Sanchez. He'll work with Ambassador Bremer, and he will work for COMCENT. That's his higher headquarters. And my headquarters will revert to CFLCC and 3rd Army ARCENT, Army Central Command, and will provide any and all support needed by this operation.

Q: General, this is Drew Brown with Knight-Ridder Newspapers. Could you talk a little bit more about the incident last night involving the 20 Iraqis that were killed? Exactly what did they strike -- what U.S. forces did they strike? Can you confirm that this was a tank column? And if so, what does this say about their willingness to go after -- with small arms, I presume, to go after bigger, you know, American targets, such as tanks?

McKiernan: Well, first, there's been no hesitancy from the beginning of this campaign for enemy forces to attack armored formations with RPGs, with small arms, with explosives, with grenades, mortars, et cetera. So, that's not a first, by any means.

This was an element that's working for the 4th Infantry Division that actually -- the 3-7 Cav out of the 3rd Infantry Division, and working with them in this operation. They were attacked at night, and then, like any good unit, they sought to gain and maintain contact with the enemy, which they did, and then took their toll on these attackers.

Whitman: We've got time for one or two more here.

Q: General, Jim Wolfe again, Reuters. Can you talk about any foreign fighters that you believe to be among those killed or apprehended? And where are they coming from?

McKiernan: Too early to tell. And again, we have not completed the exploitation of that site. And that's something we constantly look for. As you know, we had the entry of foreign fighters during the decisive combat operations part of this. So it would not be a first-time occurrence, but too early to tell on this particular target.

Q: General, this is Eric Rosenberg with Hearst Newspapers again. Aside from the two mobile weapons labs or alleged mobile weapons labs, have you found any other evidence -- and I'm including documents in that -- any evidence of active WMD programs?

And secondly, you've have plenty of time to debrief the Iraqi military officers. What do they

say about their alleged arsenal of chem-bio weapons? Did they have such doctrine to accommodate such weapons?

McKiernan: Well, I really can't answer the second part. I have not seen reports from Iraqi military that address that.

There are the two labs that have continue to be analyzed. There are numerous documents, I know, that have been seized, but I don't do the document exploitation here within my organization. They go to the analytical experts at other places. So I really can't comment on what's come out of those documents.

Whitman: (Off mike.) -- let's make this one the last one.

Q: General, Matt Kelley again, from the Associated Press. What more can you tell us about whether the attacks that have been against U.S. forces are perhaps coordinated through some sort of central authority or whether they are organized on much smaller levels?

McKiernan: That's a question that's often asked of me. I see no evidence that says there's any sort of national command and control for these activities that are going on now. I see it in -- much more decentralized, regionally or locally. There's certainly the probability that there are financial trails that lead to other parts in Iraq, and there might be communications that go to other parts. But I see these as decentralized, only coordinated locally, not nationally. And I still think a good part of them are related to those that were part of Saddam's regime, his inner regime, the Ba'ath Party, IIS, Special Republican Guard, those that know they have zero future in the next Iraq and will do everything they can to make -- to attack coalition efforts in this country.

Whitman: Once again, thank you, General, for taking some time out in your evening, our morning, to share with us your activities and operations that are ongoing. It really helps us understand some of the complexities, and we appreciate your time.

McKiernan: Okay. Thank you very much. You all have a great day.

Copyright © 2003 by Federal News Service Inc., Ste. 220, 1919 M St. NW, Washington, D. C. 20036 USA. Federal News Service is a private firm not affiliated with the federal government. No portion of this transcript may be copied, sold or retransmitted without the written authority of Federal News Service Inc. Copyright is not claimed as to any part of the original work prepared by a U.S. government officer or employee as a part of that person's official duties. For information on subscribing to the FNS Internet Service, please visit www.fednews.com or call (202)347-1400.



[Printer-friendly Version](#)



[Email A Copy](#)

[Privacy & Security Notice](#) | [External Link Disclaimer](#) | [Web Policy](#)

