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Presenter: Major General Raymond Odierno

Monday, October 27, 2003 10:08 a.m. EST

Commander, 4th Infantry Division, Maj. Gen. Raymond Odierno, via Teleconference from Tikrit, Iraq

STAFF: Good morning and thank you for joining us. I'm pleased to reintroduce to most of you -- I think all of you here, probably -- Major General Raymond Odierno of the 4th Infantry Division. He is today live from Tikrit, Iraq, and he's got some opening remarks that he'd like to make, and then we'll open up the floor to questions. And we have about 30 minutes to do this, so let me not waste any more of it.

Sir.

GEN. ODIERNO: I'd first like to say good morning, ladies and gentlemen of the Washington press corps, and an audience, I believe, is listening from central Texas. I appreciate the opportunity to talk with you all today. Before I answer your questions, I would like to take a few minutes to bring you up to date on 4th Infantry Division and Task Force Iron Horse operations here in northern Iraq.

First, I must tell you how proud and honored I am to lead these great soldiers that are part of Task Force Iron Horse. We have accomplished a tremendous amount in the past two months. Every day brings more progress toward setting the conditions for self-determination for the Iraqi people, but our significant achievements have not come without cost. We honor those heroes who have made the ultimate sacrifice to liberate the Iraqi people, and we carry on with all of them in our hearts. They are courageous Americans who love their country and what it stands for, and they'll never be forgotten. And our thoughts and prayers are with their families and loved ones as we continue operations in Iraq.

As you all know, our soldiers are involved in almost daily contact with terrorists, former regime members and common criminals. To defeat these attacks and continue to improve the security and stability within our area, we are conducting search and attack missions, crisis patrols and a series of aggressive operations to disarm, defeat and destroy hostile forces, as well as to capture mid-level former regime members responsible for organizing anti-coalition activities. These efforts have been highly successful, producing a stabilizing effect throughout the region and resulting in the capture of 35 weapons caches, several senior leaders of the former Iraqi military, Fedayeen and Ba'ath Party.

Since the 10th of September, we've been conducting Operation Ivy Focus, an ongoing effort consisting of aggressive offensive raids and continuous counter-mortar and IED ambushes to maintain pressure on enemy forces. These operations have resulted in the capture of 123 midlevel former regime members which we targeted, 43 IED makers, and six financiers. Task Force Iron Horse soldiers seized 1.5 million U.S. dollars suspected of being used to finance attacks on coalition forces, 340 AK-47s, over a thousand grenades, 680 RPG rounds, 1,340 mortar rounds, and numerous explosives, to include one pallet that was 4-by-4-by-4 foot in size, almost 1,200 blasting caps, and over 5,000 rounds of various

munitions.

The second phase of Ivy Focus, which is ongoing, is commanders' engagement with civic, religious and tribal leaders within the local populations. This develops relationships and dialogue to promote trust and cooperation. We have conducted over 800 of these engagements in the last 45 to 60 days, from company commander up to division commander level.

Toward this endeavor, we are supporting Iraq's first freely celebrated Ramadan by facilitating religious observances and honoring customs of the season. This includes lifting curfews to allow freedom of travel, and increased sensitivity to local traditions, and working with local leaders to reduce coalition presence within urban areas.

The task force has been continuously conducting stability and support operations throughout the area, impacting basic municipal services and systems to improve the quality of life of all Iraqi citizens and to provide for the long-term stability of Iraq. This includes projects to repair banks, security services, schools, health clinics and hospitals, water treatment plants, utilities, courthouses and telecommunications sites.

We have completed 883 projects, and an additional 505 are in progress. For example, we have rebuilt or renovated 480 schools; 96 percent of hospitals and health clinics have been repaired and are open; 25 water treatment plants in major cities are undergoing repairs; power generation has increased 300 percent since the beginning of the war. Many communities have running water for the first time in over 15 years. We have established women's rights councils, (guest ?) centers, computer training centers and employment center initiatives. Most of these are joint projects between coalition and forces and Iraqis, working together.

We are working to turn public security operations over to Iraqis. Every day we train and equip more local police, who join our soldiers in patrolling their cities. Currently we have almost 8,000 Iraqi police, 1,800 members of the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps and over 1,200 border police working and training alongside our soldiers to protect and build a better future for their country.

The road ahead remains challenging, but our soldiers are professionals. They will persevere and complete this continuing mission with the same motivation and dedication they have displayed from the beginning of this operation. Our soldiers will not let up the relentless pressure on the enemy and are focused on the mission at hand.

Every day we move one step closer to establishing a free Iraq run by Iraqis. There are many courageous Iraqis taking responsibility and leading the new Iraq forward.

However, we cannot do it alone, and I'm extremely proud of the unwavering support we have received from all the families and friends of Task Force Iron Horse. They are true heroes whose continuing support allow(s) us to maintain this focus. I'd like to personally thank our families for their sacrifices they endure during deployments, and all they do for our soldiers and each other.

I would also like to thank the American people for the warm reception they have given our soldiers as they have returned on R&R leave. It is important that their sacrifices are appreciated. And their stories coming back are truly great, from the great support they're getting from the American people.

I now ask you to offer any questions you might have. I'd be happy to answer any one of them.

STAFF: We have a microphone here that we'll pass around.

Q This is Will Dunham with Reuters. I just want to ask about the nature of the resistance that you're facing. In what ways is this changing or -- is the resistance changing tactics or approaches? For example, are you seeing more suicide attacks, more rocket attacks, greater synchronicity in the attacks? And if so, is this any evidence of greater coordination on a regional or national level?

GEN. ODIERNO: Yeah. First, I would say that what we've noticed is the attacks have become more stand-off. So what I mean by that is, they have -- they try to avoid direct contact, because when they've had direct contact, they tend to -- had a lot of casualties. And what we've noticed is, what the -- then people don't want to conduct those attacks any more, and the money they're paying for some individuals to conduct these attacks -- the price has gone significantly higher.

What we have seen is more mortar attacks and more explosive -- improvised explosive devices. In our specific AOR, I have not yet seen any vehicle-borne IEDs, but I suspect that that's the next step.

I think the reason they're doing this is because they want to get as much attention as they can, and they're becoming more and more desperate each day. And what they're now doing is they're going after soft targets. They're going after targets they think they can be most successful of, and then get notoriety by conducting them, because they know that they're not being successful in doing direct attacks against American forces.

We have seen a little bit of coordination at the local level, but we have not yet seen any coordination I would consider to be national. There is some local coordination. We feel very -- we feel that we understand what this coordination is, and I believe we are being rather effective against it.

Q General, Bret Baier with Fox News Channel. I appreciate your time. When we were there a couple of months ago with the secretary, you described the hunt for Saddam Hussein as tightening the noose. You said that there were some human intelligence that indicated that you thought he was in your AOR, bouncing from place to place. We haven't heard any updates on that, on the hunt for Saddam, in a couple of months. I'm wondering if you could fill us in.

GEN. ODIERNO: Well, I would just say that it has not changed much. We continue to get HUMINT reports of him being near here -- unconfirmed. Obviously, if we knew where he was, we'd have him in our custody right now. But we still believe he is operating somewhere in this locality, northern. I would say he is located somewhere in the north. We still believe he is moving around quite often. And we are -- we continue to hope that we will get the -- continue to get human intelligence. And we believe one day that, in fact, it will be accurate, and we'll be able to bring him into custody. But there is nothing really that has significantly changed from the last time that I have talked with you.

Q General, this is Jim Mannion from Agence France-Presse. Referring to Saddam Hussein, do you see any indications at this point that he is involved in any way directing the recent attacks?

And also, what is your understanding of the relationship between the foreign fighters that are said to be coming into the country and the Ba'athist loyalists?

GEN. ODIERNO: First, I have seen no indications that he is in any way controlling what's going on right now. That's not to say that -- I think it's more of a -- there is some -- what I tell everyone is, when it comes to Saddam Hussein, is he was in control of this country for 25 years. And there still is a bit of a fear to the population that he is still out there. So, I think that's the extent of his influence right now; that there's a fear that he would come back and be repressive once again. And that's why I think it's very important that they understand that we're here for the long run and that we are not going to leave here until we get a solid Iraqi government stood up so they can operate in the future and they don't have to fear Saddam Hussein, whether we capture him or not. And I think that's a very important point.

In terms of the foreign fighters, we have seen no specific information that's linking coordination between foreign fighters and the former regime loyalists. We do have reports that they are trying to come in the country. We believe we've been somewhat successful in interdicting some of them. And we have not seen any direct coordination and we've not seen any indication based on the detainees that we have that would think that there's direct coordination going on between former regime loyalists and foreign fighters that are coming in.

In fact, we do believe that because of some of the money that we have captured, that there are some problems with paying potential foreign fighters, and that's why, maybe, we have not seen them yet, because they cannot pay them the money they need in order to conduct their operations. But we continue to look for that every day, and we think that we are working very hard to interdict that and keep that from occurring.

But I believe there will be a time when they become more and more desperate, that the regime loyalists will look to go to foreign fighters and try to integrate with them, but we have not seen that so far.

Q Yes, General. This is Vince Crawley with the Army Times Newspapers. You said that you had seen a dramatic increase in the amounts of money being paid to those attacking Americans. Could you give us an idea in dollar or local currency terms? Also, does the increase in standoff attacks suggest that there would be fewer people being paid to attack Americans versus attacks being conducted by the people who actually have the vendetta against the Americans?

GEN. ODIERNO: I think those are both related. I will tell you these are just reports that we get, but when we first got here, we believed it was about \$100 to conduct an attack against coalition forces, and \$500 if you're successful. We now believe it's somewhere between \$1,000 and \$2,000 if you conduct an attack, and \$3,000 to \$5,000 if you're successful. We also believe that the price to convince people to even move weapons around or to conduct any type of operation has gone up significantly.

I believe the reason they've gone to standoff is two-fold. First, there's less amount of people that are willing to come forward and attack U.S. forces, because of the result that's occurred, several detainees and either being wounded or killed.

The second piece of that is, it's becoming so expensive that they can't afford to pay as many now, so they've had to change their techniques. And their techniques are trying to get more standoff and really go to a more terrorist -- what I consider to be terrorist activities, where they're really trying to attack civilian targets, Iraqi civilians; they are trying to go against soft targets; they're going against international organizations, we've seen, with the U.N. and today with the Red Cross.

So they're trying to get support for their fight by going after soft, civilian targets more and more and more. And that is terrorist activity, no matter how you want to paint it, in my mind.

Q General, this is Rick Whittle with the Dallas Morning News. No military operation could ever be perfect, and I'm wondering, if you could have anything you wanted right now, what would it be? Would it be more troops, some different kind of equipment, better intelligence assets? What do you need that you don't have?

GEN. ODIERNO: First, the one thing I would say is it's not more soldiers. I wish I could have a -- and we're working -- I know everybody's working this, but I'd like a technology that allows me to jam or prematurely explode these improvised explosive devices that we have been using against us, where we can use those on a daily basis. And I would be able to clear those up, and that would reduce that threat significantly. We are working on that, and I know there's several people that are, but if you ask me for one technology, that's the technology that I wish we would have, because it would help us to really protect the populace, as well as our own soldiers.

Q General, Nick Childs with the BBC. Could you say if the upsurge in attacks in Baghdad in the last couple of days have prompted you to review your security procedures in any way, particularly force protection procedures? Do you have any reaction to the upsurge in Baghdad? And also, has there been any spike, as it were, in activity in the last couple of days in your area of operation, as well?

GEN. ODIERNO: First, the last part first -- there has not been a spike in the last couple days in our area of operation. That doesn't mean it won't come, though, in the next few days.

I think because we're getting close to Ramadan, there are some individuals that want to use that

as a call to conduct operations against coalition forces, which is totally against the belief of Islam, or what everybody tells me. But I think that's part of the explanation.

We have -- first off, on our forward-operating bases, we have extreme security all the time. But we have, in fact, you know, rechecked our procedures on what we're doing in order to make sure that we protect ourselves against both vehicle-borne explosive devices, as well as individuals who might have explosive devices on them. And we have taken -- we have just kind of rebriefed all our soldiers in every one of our areas to be aware of this. We've also talked to our Iraqi counterparts, both the police and the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps, who's assisting us, and walked them through some of this, too, to make sure that they are, in fact, prepared, and understand that they are also vulnerable for attack.

Q General, Brian Hartman with ABC News. Could you help us understand the current state of play there with your human intelligence, how many walk-ins you're getting? And can you tell us, since you've been there, how much retribution has been meted out on anybody who has helped you in the past? Is that something that you find is a problem? Are your tipsters living in fear?

GEN. ODIERNO: Well, first, we are getting more and more tips every day. And let me put it in -- in fact, it is probably ten- or twenty fold more than when we first started here -- the number of attacks that we -- the number of people we have coming in to provide us human information.

And what -- even more importantly, it's more accurate human information. In fact, our success rate on -- is about 90 percent now accurate, where in the beginning it was 40 to 50 percent. Some of that has to do with our ability to understand what are the true -- who are our good informants and who give us good information and who doesn't, because there are those who try to give us false information. And we've sorted through most of that.

There are threats to Iraqis who come forward. There is intimidation that is attempted. That's part of this regime. They don't care what they do to their people. They don't care about the Iraqi people. All they care about is coming back into power.

And there is intimidation that goes on. I've seen instances where family members have been intimidated, as well as the individual who has brought forward information. What's amazing to me is they continue to come forward, even after this intimidation has occurred, because they want to see Iraq move forward. And they're very courageous people for doing this.

Q Dave Fulghum, Aviation Week. Do you give any validity to this October "lessons learned" study out of Fort Leavenworth that says Army intelligence analysts were too few in number and under trained?

GEN. ODIERNO: First, I have not seen the report, so I can't comment.

I know that I have complete confidence in all my intelligence analysts in the division, and I think they've done a very good job of what we've asked them to do.

I can't really comment on the report, because I haven't read it.

My overall assessment is, what the Army needs to do for the future is we need to focus a little bit more on human intelligence and our ability to conduct human intelligence in a quick manner, just because the nature of the battlefield has changed, and I think we've recognized that, really, for the last couple years. We still need to act on that in the Army. And so we need to work towards developing a better HUMINT structure than are already embedded into our units, because we believe that is what will work best against the threat that's out there, and then combining that with the national intelligence that's available and also the other -- SIGINT and other intelligence assets that we have available to us.

So I'm not quite as hard on them as you suggest that the article might have said. Now I'm not going to talk about national-level intelligence, because what I'm talking to you about is division level

and below, which is what I've been involved with.

Q Good afternoon, General. This is Sandra Jontz, Stars and Stripes. Could you provide some specific examples to us of how you might be educating your troops, your soldiers, to be more sensitive to the upcoming -- to be more sensitive to Ramadan?

GEN. ODIERNO: Sure. Very specifically, the simple things like during the day, don't eat, smoke or drink in front of Iraqis, because during the day, they are fasting. So, we've really gone through an instruction so they would not do that. We've also told them to be sensitive to their religious sites and the times to be sensitive, and not really be patrolling or be around those areas when they are in their time of -- when they're conducting their prayers. We've also really -- trying to turn over the urban areas to the Iraqi police and really not go into the urban areas unless absolutely necessary.

Also, Ramadan is a time of charity, and we are also coming up with different -- the units are also doing separate things for the children here, orphanages, schools and other things, so they show that we are concerned about them. And in fact, we agree with the charity piece of Ramadan as it goes forward, and that we want to support them as they move forward with their celebration.

So what we've done is we presented briefings to all our soldiers so they are aware of the cultural sensitivities of Ramadan. And I think it's been a very successful program to do that thus far.

Q General, this is Nathan Hodge of Defense Week. I wanted to know if you could elaborate a little bit more on your efforts to train and equip local Iraqi forces. Are you doing this with the assistance of contractors? What do you need more of? Do you need linguists, more funds? What are the obstacles to training Iraqi forces?

GEN. ODIERNO: First, we are training Iraqi forces -- we're training two sets of Iraqi forces. We are training the Iraqi police, and our Military Police are conducting that training. Then, we're training the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps, which is being done by our military units. And I equate the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps to a National Guard-type outfit that would do its state duties, for example. And then, we're also training border guards, and that's being done by our cavalry squadron, who has conducted border operations in the past, such as during the Cold War in Europe, and they have some experience in that area.

So, what I would tell you is I would like to improve our throughput. I think our throughput is not quite as great as I would like, and that really gets down to the fact that we have to conduct several different missions in terms of our normal day-to-day missions as well as training. So, the one thing I would ask for is some assistance in conducting this training; maybe get some civilian leadership, for example, in the police -- have expertise in training police forces, and have them come over and assist us.

And we're working very hard with higher headquarters, CPA and others -- we also -- we have to get them equipped properly. We have to get them the right communications systems and the vehicles both for the police and the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps. So we need to get that as quickly as possible to make them a viable force on the ground. So those are probably my two things I would tell you I would like to have.

But we are making great progress in training these forces. The quicker the better, because they are very enthusiastic about taking over and taking responsibility. And they are enthusiastic about leaning about how American soldiers do these jobs. They have a lot of respect for the American soldier.

And watching them work together, specifically the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps, has been very interesting. We were down there yesterday, and they're training extremely hard and very receptive to the training, and I'm very impressed with the training that's been ongoing. And in fact, we've now taken some Iraqis who were early graduates, and they are now helping us as part of the -- becoming instructors, working with American instructors in teaching the new classes. And that's been very effective thus far.

Q Sir, Dennis Ryan from Army newspaper, the Pentagram. Could you tell us what percentage of the forces opposing you are foreign born, Ba'athist, and criminals? Are they equal or is one larger than the other?

GEN. ODIERNO: I would say that 95 percent are former regime loyalists. I would say -- and there's a mixture of some people in it for criminal activity, but a lot of them are conducting criminal activity in order to pay for their operations against coalition forces, so I kind of wrap them together. And really it's a very, very small percentage of foreign fighters -- 2, 3, 4, 5 percent. We've only really picked up a few of those, a couple from Syria, some Wahhabists from other countries. But that's really been it. We have not seen a large influx of foreign fighters thus far.

Q Sir, this is Pam Hess with United Press International. Within the Ba'athists, do you see a large Wahhabi contingent? Are those two groups sort of working together?

And also, could you be very specific about what the problem is with getting the right comm systems in the vehicles? Is it that there's not the money available, or you've ordered it and it's slow, or what?

GEN. ODIERNO: We have not seen the Wahhabists and the former regime loyalists join together. We see them operating independently, very small Wahhabist cells. In fact, we think we've cracked a couple of them by picking some people up. So I haven't seen them joining together at all. In fact, what's very interesting, what I've found is Iraqis do not like people from other countries fooling in Iraqi business. They don't like Iranians here, they don't like Syrians here, they don't like -- they really like their own people being involved in this. And so it's very interesting, that they really do not like people from other adjoining countries really operating within their country as a whole. So I think it makes it a little bit difficult.

But I think when they get desperate, they might -- the former regime loyalists then might go to some use of foreign fighters. And I think we're starting to see a little bit of that now because they're starting to get a little bit desperate.

In terms of the -- if I remember, you asked me what specifically is the problem with the equipment. The funding is here. I mean, I believe it's a matter of getting it executed down to us so we can get the equipment to the police force. And it's a matter of so they can become really more capable within the cities of having cars with communications equipment in it. And so we're waiting to get that allocation of money so we can go ahead and purchase that equipment. And I believe we either have the money now or we are waiting for the supplemental. And I'd rather really refer that question to CPA about whether they've got it now, we're just waiting to get it on order, or whether they need the supplemental money in order to provide us the communications and the vehicles for the police.

Q General, this is Pauline Jelinek of the Associated Press. Others have been telling us for a couple of months now that the attackers are becoming more and more desperate. In fact, the president said it again today. And you and others have been telling us since the sons -- Hussein's sons were killed that we're getting better and better intelligence. But after a weekend like Baghdad had, I think you have to -- one has to ask where's the tipping point? With all the raids we're talking about and the captures and the better intelligence, how do you see this being turned around and when? How do you see that unfolding?

GEN. ODIERNO: Yeah, well, I guess -- I guess I can't -- I wish I could tell you a specific date and when it would happen. I don't know. But what I do know is with the people we're getting -- we're capturing, and the information we're getting from them, we are clearly cutting in to their ability to move forward. And I think that's why you see what you've seen the last couple of days. I mean -- I mean, think about what you've seen. You've seen attacks on civilian structures, you know, civilian hotel. Okay, yes, there's some military in there, but attack on a civilian hotel. You see a bombing of the International Red Cross. I mean, to me, that is fairly desperate measures. The attack on the U.N. a month ago.

You know, it appears to me they're getting more and more desperate. And what they want is they're looking for -- they want to keep the attention flowing and they realize that they're not being quite as successful. And they're seeing these Iraqi -- other Iraqis stand up and become policemen, and Iraqi Civil Defense Corps, and they're assisting the Americans in arresting them. That's not a good sign. They see that there's local governments and provincial governments in every province and town that are moving forward, that are developing budgets. They see that the electricity is getting better. They see these things occurring. The only way they can in fact do anything to take the news away from that is to do a terrorist attack. And I don't consider these attacks former regime loyalists, I consider them terrorist attacks. They are against human -- mankind, these attacks that they're conducting right now. They are not against military forces, it's not about war, this is about attacking civilian people; this is about attacking their own people, and I think it's desperate.

Somebody wanted to ask another question, so go ahead, if you do.

Q One of the first things you mentioned was the -- were the people you were getting -- the captures. So is this a fight of attrition, it's just going to take time? You have to keep finding them and -- or what will tip it the other way?

GEN. ODIERNO: Yeah, I think it is. I mean, I think it's going to take some time. I mean, this is not a three- or four- or five-day solution. This is about taking time. It is going to take some time. It's going to take some time to rebuild the infrastructure, it's going to take some time to take these former regime loyalists down because it's not clear-cut, it's not like fighting an army where they're in a uniform and we're fighting a high-intensity conflict war, such as World War II. This is about people dressed as civilians. This is about people hiding behind women and children. This is about people trying to conduct attacks using these tactics. So, you have to be careful how you move forward because you don't want to arrest the wrong people, you want to get the right people in custody. You want to make sure the people that are conducting these attacks are the ones that we take into custody. So it takes some time. It takes a little bit more effort. It takes some work. So it's not an overnight solution.

But as I look back to June, as I look back to September, I just -- I'm incredibly impressed with where we've come since then, and I'm impressed with the reaction we're getting from a lot of the Iraqi people as they see their lives starting to improve. And again, I think that's why we're seeing some of these attacks we're seeing that I think are really fairly desperate.

Q Rick Whittle with the Dallas Morning News again. I was just wondering, quickly, when is the 4th Infantry Division going back to Fort Hood, and who's going to replace them?

GEN. ODIERNO: The schedule now is we believe -- and of course it's subject -- it's all based on people able to -- the exact times, I hate to put out. But the goal is around April 1st we will return to Fort Hood and Fort Carson and Fort Lewis, which is where the majority of Task Force Ironhorse is from, as well as the 173rd out of Italy. And there's also Reserve component units from Mississippi, Missouri and Ohio and Wisconsin. We should return around the 1st of April. I expect us probably to start moving around the middle of March and probably finish somewhere around the middle of April. It could slide a few weeks here or there, but I think that's about the right timeline.

Things could change. Currently, the 1st Infantry Division is scheduled to replace us.

Q General, this is Jim Mannion from Agence France-Presse again. I just wanted to clarify. The wave of suicide attacks in Baghdad just today, you don't see that -- you see that as an escalation by the former regime loyalists rather than something new coming from outside the country; is that correct?

GEN. ODIERNO: Well, first, I don't know enough about the attacks this morning to give you a definitive answer on that.

My initial feeling would say yes, I believe it's the former regime loyalists that are conducting some of these attacks. Now whether there might be a couple foreign fighters intermixed I don't know,

because I've not had a chance to get the detailed intelligence yet on what's occurred today down in Baghdad. My initial feeling is, it's former regime loyalists doing this, maybe with minor coordination with a few people that might be not from Iraq originally. But I think it's the work of former regime loyalists. I could be wrong, but that's my assessment.

STAFF: With that, we'll bring this to a close. And thank you again, General, for taking the time to be with us. And we hope to have you back here again sometime soon.

GEN. ODIERNO: Sure. Thank you very much, and I thank you all.

And again, I just want to close by saying I'm very proud of our great soldiers over here. They're doing a great job, with great sacrifices. And we are making progress every day.

And I appreciate you taking the time to be with me today. Thank you very much.

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