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**Presenter:** Army Maj. Gen. Charles H. Swannack, Jr.

Tuesday, January 6, 2004 8:58 a.m. EST

## 82nd Airborne Division Commanding General's Briefing from Iraq

Staff: Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to this evening's press conference. Tonight Major General Swannack will be speaking to you about the 82nd Airborne Division Area of Operations during his opening comments. When he's concluded his comments he will take your questions.

If you have a cell phone or radios, please turn them off at this time. Cameramen, please do not walk in and among the journalists that are seated. When you are given the opportunity to ask your question, please state your name and the news agency that you work for, and then after you've asked the question, turn off the speaker.

Major General Swannack will address you on operational information which relates only to the operations within the 82nd Airborne Division's sector. He will not address policy issues or governmental issues. Please keep your questions to the operations within the 82nd Airborne Division area of responsibility.

"Shukran." Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, Major General Chuck Swannack.

Swannack: Well, first of all, to the Baghdad press corps, good evening. And to the Washington press corps, good morning. And to all, a happy new year. I think our world's a safer place this new year. As a matter of fact, right now on Iraq's Army Day, I'd like to compliment the Iraqi Army today, and especially congratulate the graduates of the second new Iraqi Army battalion.

It's great to some of you again, and our welcome mat is still out out there in Al Anbar Province if you ever want to come out and visit us. I'll make a few opening remarks, then I'll go ahead and take your questions.

About six weeks ago, I stood here and described for you the state of Al Anbar Province, which has almost one-third of the land mass of all of Iraq and was part of the former Ba'athist stronghold. I described then that we were turning the corner in the West, and I'm here to tell you that we have turned that corner.

I also can tell you that we're on a glide-path toward success as attacks against Task Force All American forces have decreased almost 60 percent over the past month. I believe there are a number of reasons for this decline in the attacks. Our strategy has not changed and it remains very simple: first, we actively pursue, locate and kill or capture former regime elements, extremists, foreign fighters and criminals throughout our area of operations; second, we create jobs to employ military-age males in productive employment; and third, we consolidate or destroy the vast amounts of leftover weapons and ammunition from Saddam's military machine and make these unavailable to the enemy today. This

strategy has reaped success and is the reason that we've turned the corner.

Let me further explain our success. We have killed or captured a large number of the leaders, the financiers and facilitators of the insurgency. We're not done yet, as there are a lot more of these folks out there, but we have been able to remove the ones recruiting, directing and providing weapons for attacks on coalition forces. As such, recent attacks on coalition forces have been much less effective in terms of injuries and equipment damage, and the devices employed now accurately reflect the title "improvised."

Let me just show you a makeshift RPG. This device right here was captured recently, before Christmas.

Now there are still some sophisticated devices out there, but this tells you of the dire need for forces attacking us to go ahead and use some improvised equipment to try to attack us. This is an RPG launcher.

Also, with the capture of Saddam Hussein, we have moved forward because those who had hope for his return no longer have that hope, and those who feared his return no longer have that fear. This lack of hope and fear within the populace has positively reflected in the surge of cooperation from all segments of the population at large.

Most notable is the number of local Iraqis turning information to our forces to help us rid this province of anti-coalition forces. A lot of good Iraqi people are tired of the violence and want to help the coalition. Tips turned in to us for action, both through our telephone lines and in person, are up over 50 percent right now.

Additionally, we have spent a lot of time and energy in developing, training and equipping Iraqi security forces to secure and protect the Iraqi people. Thus far we have trained over 1,300 Iraqi Civil Defense Corps -- these are ICDC folks -- and of the 6,500 Iraqi police on duty today in Al Anbar, 370 have been retrained and are able to coach and teach their fellow officers.

We continue to equip and educate Iraqi police officers in our own security college out in Ar Ramadi. We'll turn over complete control of the college, to include all instruction, within the next 60 days.

Additionally, we've trained 528 Iraqi border police who are currently manning the borders.

These trained Iraqi security forces are conducting combined operations with coalition forces every day in Al Anbar province. All our routine operations are conducted jointly with police, and we integrate ICDC more and more into our stability and support operations. In some cases, ICDC forces already operate independently.

As the second pillar of our strategy, we're creating jobs. I mentioned in late November that jobs creation would be the key to getting unemployed males off the street and enable them to provide for their families without having to commit violent acts for money. As of today, more than 16,000 jobs have been created, and more are on the way. With coalition assistance, employment offices will be opening soon in several cities that will assist the finding of work for the unemployed. In fact, 42 of 67 factories in Al Anbar are operational now. Although not all these factories are operating at full capacity yet, they are employing lots of people in producing goods.

Finally, Al Anbar is much safer now than before because of the unavailability of enemy weapons and ammunition. We've eliminated 72 of the 91 caches of captured enemy ammunition. Some of the caches are kilometers long and wide with thousands of short tons of ammunition. To assist us in this reduction process, we've hired over 50 local Al Anbar truckers and employed over 700 Iraqis in making the province safer for all of us. Coalition forces work side by side with Iraqis who care about a safe and secure new Iraq.

To date we have jointly reduced over 22,000 short tons of ammunition. And yesterday I had a huge

smile on my face for the future of Iraq as I personally blew up 100 short tons of ammunition out in western Iraq. That made a big boom for the progress of Iraq.

Now for the way ahead. Turning over the local governance is our next and perhaps our most important task. Keith Mines, the CPA governance coordinator for our province, and I are working with the local provincial leaders to establish a legitimate government in Al Anbar. We're on track to refresh the local provincial council this month, which will start the process toward the election of delegates for the new transitional government.

We have turned the corner, and now we can accelerate down the straightaway. There's still a long way to go before the finish line, but the final outcome is known. There certainly will be some friction along the way, but we will continue to kill or capture enemy forces, train Iraqi security forces to work independently, continue to create jobs, reduce the availability of weapons and ammunition, and finally, transfer the governance to local control that is legitimately recognized by the people.

Shukran. And I'll take your questions at this time. Right here.

Q: (In Arabic.)

Swannack: The question regards the attacks on coalition forces by anti-coalition forces. And it really boils down to the fact, when we're attacked, how do we react to an attack? And whether there are people around or not, our troopers are trained that you have to first identify a hostile threat before you take action.

Now, with the 82nd Airborne Division we all have close combat optics. And if you understand what that means, that means you can use very precise fire when returning fire. And so our troopers identify the target, try to identify as best where the fire is coming from, and then very surgically take out the enemy target. This is a very unscrupulous enemy we're fighting here. They're dressed in the same clothes as civilians and children; they operate amongst civilians and children. So it's a very difficult task to identify the enemy, and sometimes there are civilian casualties, but we try to minimize this as much as possible by very surgical operations against a direct threat. And I believe we have great troops out there doing the work of the coalition forces.

Right here.

Q: General, following up on that -- Brian Hartman with ABC News. Can you tell us to what extent you think that the enemy that you're fighting, that you're describing here, are former coalition members or just common criminals now? I mean, have you crossed that bridge where you think you've suppressed the insurgency enough that most of what you're seeing is criminal attacks rather than former regime figures?

Swannack: I think there are some criminal attacks out there on soft targets. But the majority of targets directed against us, coalition forces and probably Iraqis who support coalition efforts, are done by former regime elements still today.

I think we've done a very, very good job at taking out the -- as I said before, the middle management layer, the folks directing those attacks. Surely we can go ahead and take away the cell members, and we're doing that very, very successfully. Except those cell members are able to regenerate and be recruited. We're trying to dry up that recruited pool -- the pool from which they can recruit those folks. The majority of attacks are still from former regime elements, some of them from foreign fighters. But that's most of what we're dealing with these days.

Over here.

Q: Hi, sir. I'm Ned Parker (sp) with AFP News Agency. I was wondering if you could tell us

anything about the death of the two French nationals who were killed last night in the Fallujah area?

Swannack: What I know is that they were traveling in SUVs along the highway, had stopped along the highway because one of the vehicles was damaged, and they were gunned down by some folks. Don't know if it was known whether they were support contracted for by -- or who they were working for, or if they were just a soft target available, but they were basically gunned down on the side of the road by probably some terrorists.

Q: When did that happen?

Swannack: Yesterday afternoon, as I remember it. Early afternoon yesterday, around noontime.

I need to take a question from the Pentagon, please, now.

Q: General Swannack, Barbara Starr from CNN. I wanted to ask you -- as recently as November, you had commented about your concerns about the number of Iraqi forces fully trained and equipped in your area. You spoke about even concerns that they might become a hollow force. What's your assessment now of the percentage of Iraqi security forces in your region that are fully trained and equipped and ready to take on the job?

Swannack: (Off mike.) -- the ICDC training and equipping -- we still are training -- recruiting and training the ICDC very well. There's still a problem to share with you in the equipment that they have. We're still waiting on trucks and radios to fully equip these forces and give them the capability that we need to have in them.

What I'm looking for, as a commander, as we work together with ICDC in the future, is that we have shared situation awareness. In other words, I can talk on a radio to an ICDC unit, and they can understand what we are doing in concert with what they're doing. We're not there yet. We need to have the vehicular transportation and the radios. These are on order, as I understand it, should be here somewhere in the next 60 to 90 days.

So the forces are trained. They're somewhat equipped as individuals, but we need more equipment, and that's on the way, to answer your question.

Q: Can I follow up with that, though? More broadly, sir, than just the --

Staff: (Off mike.)

Q: Sir, can I talk or not?

Staff: No. (Off mike.)

Swannack: I'm sorry, Barbara?

Q: I'm sorry, General Swannack. I'm not clear if you can hear me. So I'll keep asking -- I guess you can.

Besides the ICDC, more broadly, Iraqi security forces in general, including army, in your area -- what percentage of, broadly speaking, all Iraqi security forces are fully trained and equipped in your area of responsibility, including the army?

Swannack: Well, that's a difficult question to explain. In terms of border police that we're responsible for, recruiting, training and equipping, Iraqi security police, Facilities Protection Services and ICDC, it's all about the same. They all have received individual equipment. They all received some level of

training. However, they're short some equipment; in some cases, are receiving right now heavy machine guns to provide the necessary firepower for their organization. Still no radios -- very few radios and/or vehicles to transport them around is the status right now.

I'd ask this gentleman here.

Q: Thank you, General. In Arabic, please. Radla Azawamin (sp), BBC Arabia. (Continues in Arabic.)

Swannack: Well, the second part of the question is an operational question I can't answer, about techniques we're using to go ahead and combat the enemy. However, in regards to the effectiveness of the attacks against us, the enemy has been limited, in my opinion, in the training and effectiveness of the forces they're employing right now. Former regime elements, I believe we've taken out a good amount of them, so that the folks who are attacking us now have less training, less technical capability and therefore are less effective. As examples, RPG attacks more often than not do not hit the target. IEDs explode but are way in front of a convoy or way behind a convoy, so they don't cause any damage or injuries. More often than not now, about 50 percent of the time or even more, we're receiving tips that tell us exactly where the IEDS are, that we go and then dismantle them before we're ever attacked by them.

So it's a combination of the enemy becoming less effective because of their training and expertise that make the attacks less effective, as well as the great increase in the amount of tips we get from the populace as to whom it is attacking us, who is attacking us and what munitions and where they're located. We're receiving all kinds of tips on the locations where caches are right now. That's a good-news story, very good.

Kimberly?

Q: General, can you give us a breakdown on how many cells you're battling now and what you think is the make-up, Saddam loyalists versus foreign fighters versus other elements?

Swannack: It's going to be difficult to go ahead and give you an exact number, but my take is pretty much that there's probably five or six cells operating in the major towns right now. And over that, there might be one or two directors or suppliers or financiers. We're pretty much down to Al Anbar having one regional leader, director, a couple facilitators, and then four or five, I'd say, cells per large city, one or two in the smaller cities. Foreign fighters, we're still only seeing handfuls of them. Like I said when I was here before, I think it was somewhere around 27 that we had either captured or killed. We're probably somewhere around short of 50 now, but not in any great numbers.

Q: And just a follow-up. Do you see any signs of communication between the cells that remain in your area and places like Tikrit? And also, from the last time you described the number of cells to me, that sounds like you've gotten rid of about half of them in the past three or four months.

Swannack: We've been very effective in either capturing or killing those cells, or having the cells aside no longer by taking out the financier to go ahead and support anti-coalition efforts.

In terms of your question about direct coordination and communication amongst regions, I find that much less effective nowadays than it was before. I say before; in the October-November time frame, I thought it was pretty effective command-and-control structure throughout the nation loosely directed. But since that time, I think we've been very successful -- as an example, intelligence that finally got Saddam Hussein. We've been applying that same kind of methodology and been very successful in taking out the various folks in the nodes that control and direct these activities.

Yes, right here.

Q: Hi, Jill Carrol (sp) with ANSA. A little more on the French nationals. Do you know what they

were doing? Are they contractors or something? And where exactly was the shooting -- either in Fallujah or like on the road between Amaan (ph) and Fallujah?

Swannack: First of all, they were French; they were contracted individuals, I believe, coming in here to work associated with Task Force RIE, the Restoration of Iraqi Electricity. And they were attacked along Highway 1 about eight miles to the east, I believe it is, of Fallujah, around the main highway; not close to Fallujah, outside of Fallujah pretty far.

Let me go to the Pentagon for another question, please.

Q: General, Tom Bowman with the Baltimore Sun. I wanted to ask you about the steady increase in non-hostile deaths in Iraq among soldiers. Prior to May 1st, about 20 percent of the soldier deaths were non-hostile, and since May 1st, it's increased to about 37 percent and most of these are vehicular accidents. I talked to some folks in the 101st; they're working with safety officers from Fort Campbell and also putting out safety messages. Could you talk a little bit about your AOR, the problem of non-hostile deaths, and what you folks are doing to try to stem it?

Swannack: Okay, good question. In all cases we try to minimize and reduce the risk to our soldiers. However, out on the roads everyday, on the back roads of Iraq, old minefields, and even more importantly probably, worn roads -- it's a very dangerous place to drive, especially at night. We have a lot of vehicle accidents with Iraqis on the road. Additionally, in some cases we lost a soldier from a rollover because the road gave away, the actual road, because of some of the rains this time of year cause erosion, and the road went away when the equipment went across it. And so we have to be wary of that.

The only way we can go ahead and combat this is to make risk management in everything we do and delegate down to the lowest level possible our leaders to go ahead and decide not to do something if it's too great a risk and it might cause death or permanent disability from some injury.

Right here.

Q: Hi, General. Anne Bernard (sp) from The Boston Globe. I just wondered if you could give us some more specific numbers on a couple of the items you mentioned. On the jobs, do you have a percentage -- unemployment figures in the province and how they've changed since you've been there?

And also, on the number of attacks on coalition forces, when you said they're down 60 percent, can you actually give us the beginning number and the ending number, and exactly what time period you're talking about there? Thanks.

Swannack: Good. First of all, in terms of jobs creation, I figured that we had about 60 percent unemployed when we first got to Al Anbar province in September. Now some of those had -- were making money, but I'm not sure they were making money by legitimate means.

Subsequent to that time, with the creation of about 16,000 jobs, I believe that we're trying to get to a number of around 30,000 jobs, so we're halfway to get the unemployment ranks somewhere between 20 and 30 percent. So that's the approach we're trying to make.

There's a lot -- about 50 percent of the population out there is 25 years old or below. And so trying to find them jobs is a difficult task. But as I mentioned, the 700 Iraqis we've employed to go ahead and consolidate these munitions, empty out the bunkers, to put them on trucks, to go ahead and consolidate them under our control, is something that we employ those folks.

Your second question is about attacks. I'll tell you, in a daily number, we started getting here -- getting attacked in September at about, I'd say, seven to 10 attacks a day. In October, we started getting upwards -- 15 to 19 attacks a day, until about Halloween, the 31st of October. Subsequent to that time,

our attacks have been somewhere between no attacks a day to three or four, at the highest. So we've gone now from 19 -- 15 to 19 attacks a day, as a norm, down to, I would say, two to five attacks a day. So that's a significant decrease.

And more importantly about that is what I spoke of -- is the effectiveness of those attacks. Most of those attacks are ineffective. An RPG doesn't even come close to us, or an IED that blows up somewhere around us, or an explosion that we hear that's not even a mortar fire -- not even near us.

Okay. In the back, back there.

Q: General Swannack, Anne Garrels from National Public Radio. I have two questions, quite different. First question, very simple: Why the continued shortage of equipment?

Swannack: Okay. First of all, the equipment shortage is a function of supplemental monies now that have let contracts to go ahead and receive vendors to support those contracts. And we're supposed to get that equipment in somewhere -- 45 to 60 days -- 60 to 90, I guess, would be fair estimate.

Q: And second question: You say one of the key issues now is turning over more responsibility to the local government and creating a legitimate local government in the region. I've talked to many Iraqis in your area, and there seems to be a lack of confidence in the current senior Iraqi leadership in your region. Can you say how you hope to resolve this issue?

Swannack: We've pretty much -- in terms of the governance issue, we've determined that we have to have a representative government all sectors. Right now, our Provincial Council, which was established in August, pretty much was directed by coalition forces at the time, the leadership from the tribes in the area. Thirty-six of the 51 members of the council were tribal sheikhs. And so now we're going to go ahead and we've established a sheikh council where all the sheikhs are represented and can come to a sheikh council, which will have eight representatives in the new 40-person Provincial Council. We'll have representatives from the education, from business, from health, and from legal. And so that's how we're approaching a broad representation by gender and by occupation into the new Provincial Council.

Q: Are you having cooperation locally on doing that?

Swannack: Yes, we are. We're starting the caucus process right now. It's been explained, and it's favorably been received. As I said, the sheikhs have now got their own council and have bought into eight members in the future Provincial Council. So yes, it is.

Right over here.

Q: I'm sorry, I came in late. I'm from French Radio. Regarding the two French nationals killed in Fallujah last night, do you have any additional details? Second question, how do you characterize the security situation for foreign nationals here to work in reconstruction projects?

Swannack: Okay, I've already answered the first part of the question. You might want to check with your colleagues, rather than have them go through it a second time.

But in terms of foreign nationals and/or contractors coming to the area, you have to have, I believe, security. It's important to have security and not be a target on the side of the road. And it's just -- it's pretty important to go ahead and ensure that you go where you should go and not make yourself vulnerable to attacks. That's what I can say for this case. The individuals stopped -- if you didn't hear -- stopped on the side of the road to go ahead and repair one car when they had two cars. They were there for some couple of hours and got in trouble, and that's what happened to them.

Okay, Pentagon. I'll go one more question from the Pentagon, one more question from here. First of all the Pentagon.

Q: Hi, General. Jim Garamone with American Forces Press Service. I was wondering if you could just clear up some of my confusion. Earlier you said five to six cells were operating in the major towns, and then after that, you said there were four to five cells per large city. How many cells are in your area? And can you break that down into how many anti-coalition forces do you think you have facing you? Thanks.

Swannack: What I was trying to get at is about somewhere around four or five cells in towns like Fallujah and towns like Ar Ramadi and towns like Husaybah, even though we conducted recent operations there, probably a couple of cells are trying to regenerate themselves. Small towns like Hit or Rutbah, they might have one cell to two cells, just some disenfranchised individuals, former regime elements that want to go ahead and try to create attacks on or generate attacks on American forces.

I would say somewhere in the neighborhood of less than 100 people out there in Al Anbar Province right now. That's significantly down from when I was giving estimates back in September and October. That's a function of the great support we've gotten from the populace pointing out to us exactly who these former regime elements are, telling us where the foreign fighters are when they come in the country. And so we're making good headway in that regard.

Does that answer your question? (Pause.) I guess so. Okay, last one in here. You right there.

Q: General, Andrew Marshall from Reuters. Following the release of the four journalists who were detained near Fallujah on Friday, have you changed your views about whether fighters posing as journalists fired on U.S. forces near Fallujah that day?

Swannack: Okay. Regarding the four reporters in Fallujah, first of all, we're still conducting the investigation. We determined through questioning these individuals that they were probably at the wrong place at the wrong time. We had two statements from soldiers that indicated that one of the press individuals wearing a press bulletproof vest had an AK-47 and fired at us, the other one had an RPG-7. We don't have any credible evidence in that regard, so we released them; however, we are continuing the investigation. We know through their bureau chiefs how to get in touch with them if we want to question them or even pick them up again.

Q: Sir, if I can ask one follow-up question.

Swannack: Right.

Q: From talking to our journalists who work wearing the press jackets, we believe one was carrying a tripod, one was carrying a camera. Is it possible that your soldiers may have mistaken these items for weapons and that's where the confusion arose?

Swannack: I don't want to speculate on what those soldiers saw. They have sworn statements on what they said they saw, and that's good enough for me. I back up our troopers 100 percent. However, I do go ahead and investigate incidents like this to find out what really happened. But down there on the front lines, our troopers make snap judgments, and more often -- I mean much, much, much more often than not, they're right.

Thank you very much. Come out and see us in Al Anbar. Have a great day.

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