

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH MAJOR GENERAL JAMES "MIKE" MILANO, DEPUTY COMMANDING GENERAL, DIRECTORATE OF INTERIOR AFFAIRS, MULTINATIONAL SECURITY TRANSITION COMMAND IRAQ VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM IRAQ
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GEN. MILANO: Okay. Good morning to all of you, and it's a pleasure to be with you this morning. As Gary (sp) mentioned, I run this thing called the Directorate of Interior Affairs, which is one of the major suborganizations of MNSTC-I. And I've been in this position since July.

My mission is to assist the Ministry of the Interior to complete the generation of professional, credible police forces while at the same time developing institutional capacity to acquire, train, develop, manage, sustain and resource those forces, leading to self-reliance and maintenance of the rule of law.

I am really the principal engager with Minister Bolani and several of his deputy ministers -- Senior Deputy Minister al-Asadi. And I have two real subcomponents to my organization. One is called CPATT -- Coalition Police Advisory Training Team -- which essentially helps to man, train and equip Iraqi police forces. And then I have the Ministry of Interior Transition Team, which daily engages literally from top to bottom in the 11-story Ministry of the Interior building across all functional areas -- or most functional areas, I should say, to help them build ministerial capacity and help them be a functioning, effective bureaucracy.

The Ministry of the Interior today numbers around 480,000. As most of you probably know, in 2003 it was approximately 60,000 in strength. So it's grown more than eight-fold in the last five years. And so there are the attendant challenges with the ministry in functioning and doing those things that we expect the higher headquarters to do.

So with that, I will open it up to your questions.

CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Okay.

MODERATOR: Spencer, I think you were the first one in. Do you want to go first?

Q I would. Thanks very much, General. Thanks very much, everyone. I have to start by asking about this arrest of up to 35 MOI officials. I'm sure you saw the story and familiar with it. Can you give us any information about

this? The report said that there was some attempt at reconstituting a Ba'athist cell for a potential coup. Had you worked with any of these individuals? What can you say about the credibility of those charges?

And relatedly, a big fear that the Maliki government has had with incorporating the Sons of Iraq into security force positions has been the prospect of a coup. Can you speak to how this could or could not complicate efforts at integrating the Sons of Iraq into the Ministry of Interior?

GEN. MILANO: Yeah, I don't have any additional details on the story that appeared in The New York Times this morning. I do want to emphasize this is an internal government of Iraq issue to comment on, and so I would recommend to you that the government of Iraq is the best resource for information regarding your question. And I think they've actually had a press conference or two or issued a couple of statements this afternoon, which I haven't seen yet.

Q Can you talk about the Sons of Iraq question and how this might complicate any integration or just how the -- that integration is going? Thank you.

GEN. MILANO: Well, the government of Iraq is fully committed to the Sons of Iraq program, as is the coalition. You know, we've had approximately 10,500 Sons of Iraq transitioned so far, primarily into the police. Another 12,500 SOIs are in the process of eventually being hired into the Iraqi police. Just last week we graduated a class of about 1,100 Sons of Iraq from a police academy here in Baghdad. We have a second group of about a thousand SOIs going through basic recruit training for the police.

So the government of Iraq is -- particularly the Ministry of Interior -- is moving out and has led by example, if you will, on the government of Iraq effort to integrate these Sons of Iraq into the government and into society and get them, you know, long-term sustainable employment.

(Audio break.) Does that answer your question?

Q Sure. I guess -- I don't want to take up any more time, so I'll move on. Thank you.

GEN. MILANO: Okay.

MODERATOR: Do you want to -- Chuck, you want to go next?

Q Yes. This is Chuck Simmins from America's North Shore Journal. I wanted to ask about the Kurdish provinces. And when we talk with you, General, when we talk with other folks involved in the mentoring effort, are the Kurdish provinces included in the work that's being done? Are they being treated as a separate mentoring issue? Or are they not at all involved with coalition mentoring at this time?

GEN. MILANO: Well, I work primarily with the Ministry of Interior, which is focused primarily on the 15 provinces that don't include, obviously, those in the Kurdish Regional Government. The KRG does have its own KMOI, but from a capacity-building standpoint, from a professionalization standpoint, we, the coalition, are working with all 18 provinces to enhance their capabilities and help them man, train and equip their police forces.

So you know, while I deal primarily with the Ministry of Interior, I also have a relationship with the Kurdish MOI, Minister Sinjari. And we are helping assist in their professionalization.

As an example, in October, we recently completed the construction of the Erbil police college, roughly a \$13 million project, to which the coalition provided about \$10 million. And the Kurdish Regional Government contributed about 3 million (dollars). That will produce officers for Iraq, and attendance at that college is open to both Iraqi and, you know, Kurdish officers.

Q Okay. Thank you.

GEN. MILANO: Sure.

MODERATOR: Marisa, how about you?

Q Sure. Thank you, sir. This is Marisa Cochrane, with the Institute for the Study of War. I'm curious if you could comment on what MNSTC-I's relationship is with this elite counterterrorism unit that reports directly to the prime minister's office. Do you have any interaction with them?

GEN. MILANO: I don't. MNSTC-I has an advisory relationship principally with the Ministry of Interior, which is what I do; the Ministry of Defense, and we have a Directorate of Defense Affairs that deals with them; and then we have the Iraqi counterterrorism force transition team, which is also part of MNSTC-I. So we have a direct -- we, MNSTC-I, have a direct advisory and partnership role with the Iraqi counterterrorism command.

Q Okay --

GEN. MILANO: And there's a Brigadier General Semtombidas (ph), who essentially does what I do with Ministry of Interior.

Q Okay, so you do interact. Did you have any -- or did, I should say, I guess, MNSTC-I have any advance notice of this raid?

GEN. MILANO: If you're regarding the -- if you're referencing the story that appeared in The New York Times, again, I refer you to the government of Iraq for comment on that. I don't have any more details than what appeared in that story.

Q Thank you, sir.

GEN. MILANO: Thank you.

MODERATOR: Christian, go ahead, you're next.

Q Thanks. General Milano, this is Christian Lowe with military.com. Early on, before the Q&A session, you called yourself the principal engager with Prime Minister Bolani, who's the head of Ministry of Interior. So what is your -- what was your personal discussion or knowledge with him on the problems that resulted in this raid and arrest of these folks? I'm not asking for the Iraqi government's comment. I'm asking for your personal perspective on this.

GEN. MILANO: I haven't talked to Minister Bolani about this. I see him once or twice a week, and I have not, honestly, spoken to him today. Q

Okay. Had you spoken with him in the past about problems that you saw or assessed in loyalties of top officials within the Ministry of Interior?

GEN. MILANO: No. And one of Minister Bolani's strategic priorities, both this year and for 2009, is increasing professionalism, ethics-based behavior, eradicating corruption from the ministry.

He has a very aggressive and active internal affairs department, and he takes very seriously development and enforcement of police ethic, eliminating sectarian behavior, corruption, and he's very much interested in, you know, shifting to an evidentiary-based, warrant-based, rule-of-law-based police force.

Q So, just to be clear -- sorry, Jack, just to be clear. So you had no advance discussion or knowledge that this was going on, or you personally as the principal adviser to him didn't see any kinds of problems that might have caused this?

GEN. MILANO: No, I didn't.

Q Okay. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Andrew, you're next.

Q Yes, sir. General, good afternoon. Andrew Lubin from Naval Institute's magazine, Proceedings. Sir, I want to take the discussion out into the field a bit. With the new status of forces agreement, our soldiers and Marines are now required to give warnings before they go into houses. How is this going to affect their SOP, and how is this going to affect their operations?

GEN. MILANO: Well, it will require some increased coordination and collaboration, but, you know, what we do in terms of our mission here isn't going to change as a result of the security agreement and its implementation. How we do it may change, and some of those details are being worked out right now. But what it means is increased coordination, cooperation and collaboration with the various security ministries here.

Q Does this affect their safety out there in the streets?

GEN. MILANO: Our coalition soldiers?

Q Yes, sir.

GEN. MILANO: No. No, it doesn't. At least I don't see it affecting that. I don't think it will affect any of our force protection measures or precautions or operations at all.

Q Okay, thank you. GEN. MILANO: Thank you.

MODERATOR: Bill, you still there?

Q Yes, I am.

MODERATOR: Go ahead.

Q General, Bill Roggio with the Long War Journal. Quick question on the post-2011. Hopefully you could comment on this. Do you expect to have embedded trainers embedded with the Iraqi -- with units within the Interior Ministry after that date?

GEN. MILANO: I really can't say definitively, Bill. You know, it really depends on the progress made by the Ministry of Interior, the police forces. But there's a lot of variables associated with that. We see continuing development, increased capabilities, Bill.

What the ministry is focused on right now is this transition to policy primacy, where the police are responsible for maintaining internal security here in the country. And the military is focused on external threats to the country.

How long the transition to police primacy will take, I don't know. That's conditions-based. And as most of you know, I'm sure, from north to south, east to west, in Iraq, the security condition varies, depending on where you are.

But this transition to police primacy and emphasis on the rule of law and the corresponding transition from a concessions-based system to an evidentiary-based criminal justice system, and all the pieces that go along with that -- competent investigators, forensics capability, a judicial system that can move folks speedily through hearings and whatnot -- all that, you know, has yet to be fully developed. It is making progress now. But you know, regarding a time frame, beyond which we may or may not have advisers here, I couldn't comment on that.

Q Thank you, General.

GEN. MILANO: Thank you.

MODERATOR: Jarred, go ahead.

Q Yes, sir. Thank you for your time.

Can you talk a little bit about what you were touching on before, your personal experiences in seeing the whole experience of what goes on, in the ministry of interior?

What struck you in the last several months, as far as what you see on the ground, what you see when you talk with the officers, when you talk with the jundi, when you talk with individual shurta or just traveling through the city or the region?

GEN. MILANO: Yeah.

Q Just what have you been picking up?

GEN. MILANO: That's a great question. And I've actually been here in Baghdad for 13 months. I spent 8 months with Multinational Division-Baghdad as the deputy commanding general for Support. So I know Baghdad fairly well. But what struck me regarding the ministry of interior is the rapid growth. Again pick any organization out there. To have it grow eight times in five years is remarkable.

And you know, our major focus is helping the ministry deal with issues like developing a strategic logistics system, doing effective strategic planning that's linked to a budgeting process, human resource development programs, such as what we have in the United States Army -- officer education system, non-commissioned officer education system; they don't have any of that -- strategic planning priorities, forensics capability, investigative skills.

We're helping them develop curriculum at their training and qualifications institute. They didn't have a lot of that.

And you know, back before 2003, the police were one of several security agencies here in Iraq whose sole purpose was to keep Saddam Hussein in power, to protect the regime. Today we're trying to flip that around and elevate the police to a position of primacy here in the country, to where they're -- the populace has confidence in them, they trust them. And by the way, we're seeing positive trends in that regard, in terms of the public's perception of its police.

But what struck me is the enormous growth that's taken place in how this fledgling bureaucracy is attempting to deal with that growth and do things that I don't want to say we take for granted in the United States Army, but happen relatively easily in terms of manning, training, equipping. They have some issues in that regard, and we're helping them work through them.

But in my interactions with Minister Bolani, I've found him to be an extremely competent, professional, non-sectarian, apolitical figure. And he demands that from those who work for him. And he will not hesitate to take action against corruption or other, you know, illegal or illicit activity in the ministry.

Does that answer your question? Because I could talk a long time about -- (chuckles) -- my impressions of the ministry.

Q Yes, sir. I mean, obviously, when we come back around for more questions, that would be my follow-up. You could just continue with some more of your stories.

GEN. MILANO: Yeah.

Q That'd be great.

GEN. MILANO: And I'd just, you know, sort of sum it by saying I've seen significant progress just in my five months or six months or so in this position, but we have an awful lot of work to do. We're not where we need to be. Minister Bolani recognizes that. But we look forward to the continued partnership and advisory role that we'll play here in the future. Thank you.

MODERATOR: I think someone came in at the end.

Q Yeah. It's Paul McLeary from DTI.

MODERATOR: Okay. Go ahead, Paul.

Q Hi, General. Thanks for talking to us.

GEN. MILANO: Sure.

Q I'm curious on the -- what the status of the transition of the Sons of Iraq movement is. Is it mostly finished at this point? And are these guys being moved into security positions, or are they being trained for other jobs, or -- where are they?

GEN. MILANO: Yeah. I talked about this up front --

Q Okay. Sorry.

GEN. MILANO: -- but I'll gladly go over it again. About -- roughly about 10,500 have transitioned so far, primarily to the police force. We've got another 12,500 or so in the process of being hired into the Iraqi police. Just last week we graduated a class of about 1,100 from basic recruit training here in Baghdad. We've got another class of about a thousand SOIs in basic recruit training. Both of those basic recruit training classes are for the police.

The transition, as you know, to the government of Iraq control began in Baghdad. That transition went very well, virtually without incident. And then the next provinces to transfer to government of Iraq control are Diyala, Wasat, Babil and Qadisiyah.

So the program is progressing well. And you know, the government of Iraq is fully committed to the program, as is the coalition, to make sure that these individuals are taken care of.

Q Okay. Thanks.

MODERATOR: Has anyone else not asked a question yet?

Okay. We've got a little time left.

Q Can we go around again? Start -- MODERATOR: Yeah. We'll turn back around again.

Spencer?

Q Yeah. To build on Christian's question, you're the -- does this at all surprise you, that there could have been what has been described as a thwarted coup attempt in this ministry? Apparently people up to the rank of general were arrested in this. Did -- I -- I'm just sort of surprised to hear that you are this principal engager, as you describe yourself, and you didn't know about this. Does this at all surprise you? Did you see this happening?

GEN. MILANO: Again, I'm not going to make any assessments if I -- until I see all the facts. And the only thing I've seen is the story that appeared in The New York Times.

So I don't have all the facts on which to make an assessment, but I was not privy to this. And again, I see Minister Bolani once or twice a week. But I really do recommend that you contact the government of Iraq as the best resource, and maybe take a look at some of the statements that the government's made this afternoon here.

MODERATOR: Okay. Chuck?

Q Yeah. General, which of the problems would you say currently needs the most work with the local police, and is it a sectarian issue, or is it something else?

GEN. MILANO: You know, I'm not really in a position from an operational standpoint to make that kind of assessment. I do more of the manning, training, equipping and so forth. The Multinational Corps Iraq controls the police training teams who are out there at virtually all the stations, the districts and the provinces. And so they are, you know, operationally engaged. You know, it's really hard to pinpoint, you know, one province to say this one needs the most work.

Q Well, from --

GEN. MILANO: I would say none of them is where it wants to be.

Q From the logistics --

GEN. MILANO: But they're all making progress. Go ahead.

Q From your logistics perspective, where would you say are you having some problems?

GEN. MILANO: Well, we're having logistics issues across the board, in terms of fuel distribution, ammo distribution, maintenance. We are -- we and the MOI are building fuel distribution points, regional maintenance facilities. We've recently seen an increase in fuel distribution and training ammunition.

There are a total of 26 training centers in Iraq, and I've visited, you know, a good number of those. But I see issues with logistics at those. In terms of lighting support, you know, we still haven't solved the electricity issue here in Iraq. And so, you know, there are some issues regarding (life/light ?) support at some of the training facilities. But by and large, I'm seeing improvement, also.

But, you know, logistically, they have some work to do. You know, one of the reasons that the logistics is such a challenge is, number one, the size of the ministry -- again, almost 500,000 -- but the widely disparate nature of the types of forces you have in the ministry. You've got National Police; you've got Oil Police; you've got Directorate of Border Enforcement; the Border Police; Facilities Protection Service; local police; Emergency Response Brigade; a lot of different kinds of units -- some national, some local.

We've got some capacity-building to do with the provincial directors of police, in terms of their ability to manage some of these issues within their province -- in other words, logistics issues, communications issues, planning issues, contracting issues. So, you know, really, no matter which province you look at, we're going to find issues there, some more extreme than others.

Q All right, thank you.

GEN. MILANO: Okay.

MODERATOR: Okay, Marisa, you're up.

Q Thank you, General. As you support Interior Minister Bolani's efforts to professionalize the MOI and move to an evidentiary-based system, have you encountered any resistance from elements -- from the Iraqi government?

GEN. MILANO: No. You know, any functioning democratic society is going to have a -- you know, an effective rule of law, you know, applied fairly and uniformly to both public officials and ordinary citizens, you know, and is going to ensure that the central institutions of the legal system -- the courts, the prosecutors and police are competent and efficient. So -- so I haven't seen any resistance to that at all.

I mean, I -- that's what legitimacy as a government's all about. And I think the vast majority of the officials in this government want it to be perceived as legitimate, fair and competent.

MODERATOR: Okay. Christian?

Q Thanks, General. Two quick follow-ups: Number one, I want to make sure that I understood you clearly when you answered Andrew Lubin's question earlier about the need to obtain warrants before raids.

You're saying that has no effect on operations or on the safety of U.S. troops.

And number two --

GEN. MILANO: No.

Q Okay.

GEN. MILANO: One at a time.

What I said was, I don't think it's going to have an impact on the execution of the operations.

(Cross talk.)

Q It won't delay the operations.

Are you saying it won't delay the operations?

GEN. MILANO: No. I'm just saying it's going to require some additional coordination and collaboration ahead of time, before we execute. So we've got to backwards plan and coordinate accordingly.

Q Okay. And then number two, you said there were one, two, three, four provinces that were the next up to transition to Iraqi control -- Diyala, Wasit, Babil and Qadisiyyah. Can you give us some dates on that, please?

GEN. MILANO: No. Those were the ones that -- the next provinces to transfer Sons of Iraq to government of Iraq control are Diyala, Wasit, Babil and Qadisiyyah.

Q Oh, okay.

GEN. MILANO: I don't have a timeline for that. But those are the next ones in the queue, after Baghdad, for the transition of the SOIs.

Q Okay. Okay, thank you very much. That's all I needed.

GEN. MILANO: Yeah.

No. You know, I just want to be clear that the increased coordination and collaboration regarding warrant-based operations -- we'll take the appropriate precautions and measures as a result of needing to do that coordination and cooperation.

Q Yeah. But I mean, I was just asking this because having been there a few times, you know, this intelligence and the need to move happens very quickly.

And to put it through a process of warrants, especially in a province that doesn't have as developed a legal system as, say, Baghdad -- all of a sudden your guy's gone, or he's bolstered his defenses and made your operation a lot more difficult.

GEN. MILANO: Yeah, and we're just going to have to work through that.

Q Okay. Thanks.

MODERATOR: Andrew?

Q No, I'll pass. Thanks.

MODERATOR: Okay. Bill?

Q Yes. General, the Interior Ministry particularly is often characterized as an extension of the Iranian government, or to be Iranian, you know, compromised. Could you discuss that a little bit, and what your observations are with working with the Interior Ministry?

GEN. MILANO: Yeah, I don't buy that. Again, my views of Minister Bolani are that, at least as I have seen, he operates in a non-sectarian, apolitical manner. He's focused on doing what's right. He doesn't tolerate corruption or infiltration. He's got a very active internal affairs leader. So I don't buy that. I think the ministry is making great progress towards professionalizing itself and instilling ethical -- ethics-based behavior.

Q Could you cite any examples, say, like raids against, like, the Hezbollah brigades or the League of the Righteous or anything? Is there anything that sort of sticks out that could tell you that, you know, look, this doesn't happen. Here's how we could see why -- you know, operations against Iranian-supported groups?

GEN. MILANO: Well, no, but one thing that does come to mind is that, you know, recently at the Baghdad police college, which is where they produce officers -- they have a three-year course to produce officers. Part of the vetting process for those applicants -- there are more applicants than they have spaces -- is questioning by a series of committees, one headed up by a Sunni general, one headed up by a Shi'a general, and one headed up by a Kurdish general. And to me, that's a great example of, you know, egalitarian behavior and non-sectarian views on building this force. I thought that was a very good development, which happened here recently, in the last six weeks or so.

So again, you know, Minister Bolani, in my view, is very committed to -
- to having his ministry function as a, you know, non- sectarian, apolitical
entity.

Q Thank you, General.

GEN. MILANO: Thank you.

MODERATOR: Okay. We're going to be running short of time, so I think
-- Jarred, I think this might be the last one.

Q Okay. Great. Sir, perhaps, you know, I'll leave this open to
you to explain a little bit more about what you see, what's really improved in
the last few months, probably what surprised you the most about the improvement
that you've seen.

GEN. MILANO: What surprised me the most about the improvement I've
seen. The national police -- and I've worked with them a little bit, or at
least, you know, had contact with them and seen how they train and operate. You
know, 18 months ago, the Jones commission report recommended abolishing the
national police. They are a very competent organization, as has been witnessed
this past year in various operations here in Iraq.

The four-phased program to professionalize the national police is well
under way. Just to revisit with you, phase one, you know, in the September of
'07 was a leadership assessment, which resulted in the vast majority of the
leadership of the national police being relieved -- generals, brigade
commanders, battalion commanders.

Then they went through a training at Numaniyah, the entire national
police. And that was completed in October of '07.

And then we've been conducting Carabinieri -- Italian Carabinieri-led
training at Camp Dublin, at Victory Base. And that is enhancing their police
skills, enhancing their professionalism and whatnot.

And then the next step of this four-phased program will be
regionalization of the national police, where the minister's objective is a
national police brigade or battalion in each province.

So you know, I had heard some things about the national police before I
got to Iraq 13 months ago. And I have found in my interaction with them to be a
very capable, competent and professional force. Still have a lot of work to do
with them, but they have, you know, come a long way from at least what I read
about them about 15 months ago. Q General, can I jump in real quick? It's
Bill. Just real quick, you mentioned the Jones report.

GEN. MILANO: Yeah.

Q What do you think -- we track this, the development of the
security forces, really closely. To us it looked like they were operating on
data that was like two years old or something. Could you comment on that just
really quickly? And I apologize for jumping in, but that's something that's
been nagging --

GEN. MILANO: Well, their assessment was conducted -- yeah, their
assessment was conducted, if I recall, during the summer of '07, from roughly --

and I'm not exactly sure of these dates, but from roughly May through August of '07.

The report came out in September of '07. So I think that's the data -- the time frame that their data's based on. But again, I -- my interactions and observation of the National Police are positive, not that we don't have more work to do.

Hey, listen, folks, I've got to run now.

Q Thank you, sir.

GEN. MILANO: But I appreciate your time and I appreciate your questions. And I would just tell you that I have a fascinating job. I'm seeing progress each and every day with the ministry. There are still many challenges out there. We have an awful lot of work to do, but we are making progress. And so I thank you all for your time this afternoon.

Q Thank you, General.

Q Thank you, General; best of luck.

END.