

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH LIEUTENANT COLONEL JEFFREY KULMAYER, CHIEF OF RECONCILIATION FOR MULTI-NATIONAL CORPS-IRAQ VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM IRAQ SUBJECT: THE SONS OF IRAQ PROGRAM MODERATOR: CHARLES "JACK" HOLT, CHIEF, NEW MEDIA OPERATIONS, OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS TIME: 9:00 A.M. EST DATE: THURSDAY, JANUARY 8, 2009

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COL. KULMAYER: Okay, hello. This is Lieutenant Colonel Jeff Kulmayer of Reconciliation and Engagement here at Multi-National Corps-Iraq. I just want to thank you for the opportunity you're giving me to contribute to your online discussion about the progress here in Iraq. And I read through some of the background of many of you and I find that a number of you are veterans, and I thank you for your service, and I look forward to our engagement today.

As the chief of Engagement and Reconciliation, let me just tell you what we consider as reconciliation in Iraq. That's the rebuilding of relationships to create a strong national identity, a sovereign government of Iraq, and trust between the citizens and their government, enabling the Iraqis to manage sectarian differences and build a shared future, and reconciliation is a force and corps priority. And what we consider the leading edge of reconciliation in Iraq is the Sons of Iraq program, and so that's what I want to talk to you about today. And I know many of you are familiar with the Sons of Iraq.

As you know, they have been instrumental to the security gains that we have today, and the levels of violence are down at their lowest levels since 2003, and a 90-percent decrease really across the battlespace here. And part of that has been because of the contributions of the Sons of Iraq. They have thickened the battlefield and allowed coalition and Iraqi security forces to get after the enemy, and they've done this at great sacrifice. More than 500 SOI have been killed this year alone -- in 2008, I mean -- and over 750 wounded.

And so, as we've been managing the program, we always knew that it would be temporary, and when the security gains were there, we intended to turn it back over to the government of Iraq, and so that's what we're doing right now. And since we began transferring the program to the government of Iraq by province on the 1st of October, 2008 -- just to give you a total of what we've got, there were a total of about 94,000 Sons of Iraq in nine provinces and across the battlespace of four of our multinational divisions. And so we began to transfer by province with Baghdad on the 1st of October, and that included more than half -- 51,000 -- of the Sons of Iraq.

The plan that we have is to transfer them to the control of the Iraqi government and then follow through as they transition them into permanent

employment. Twenty percent will go into the Iraqi security forces, principally the Iraqi police, and then the remainder will be placed into permanent employment according to their skills, or they'll be given job training, which many of them need, and then employment. So the coalition forces are going to continue to work with the Iraqi government throughout this process. We really see it as a commitment on our part to the Sons of Iraq, who have helped us here, and really, frankly, stood up for their country. And so we don't intend to transfer them and abandon them; we intend to transfer them and ensure that they are provided meaningful employment in the future.

On the first of January we transferred four more provinces -- Diyala, which is actually the most complex province -- and then also the southern provinces -- Babil, Wasit and Qadisiyyah. And so we're working through this month as the last coalition-led payday, and then the Iraqis will pick up paying the salaries next month for these provinces. So, as of today, we're about 75 percent of the Sons of Iraq transferred to the control of the Iraqi government, and we'll finish the transfer process in April. We'll do Anbar in February, Ninawa and Kirkuk in March, and then Salah ad-Din in April. And so, in the meantime the progress on the jobs is a little slower. Since October we've had about 3,000 go into the Iraqi police. In fact, there's a class in the police academy here in Baghdad right now that will graduate next week. There's about 942 Sons of Iraq in that class. And as far as non-security employment, that's a little tougher because, frankly, the job situation and the unemployment is high here. Unemployment is high and jobs are difficult to create. Only about 1,600 have so far transitioned. So we've got a lot of work to do still with the Iraqi government to create the jobs and to move the Sons of Iraq out of the security role that they're doing right now and into these permanent jobs, but it's something that we're going to stay with.

And so, with that I'll just -- I'll open it up for any questions.

MR. HOLT: All right, so thank you very much. And, Andrew, since you were first online, why don't you get us started?

Q Okay. Colonel, good afternoon. This is Andrew Lubin from the Military Observer. Thanks for taking the time today, sir.

COL. KULMAYER: Sure.

Q Colonel, can you give us some more definitive numbers on what's happening now? You've got 94,000 SOI, so you've got 3,000 as ITs and only 1,600 in jobs and job training? Does this mean the others are kind of paid to sit, or what are the other 90,000 SOIs doing?

COL. KULMAYER: Well, they're continuing to do what they did the day before they transferred to the Iraqi government, and that's provide critical infrastructure security in their positions. Essentially what the transfer means is that they're no longer taking their orders from the coalition; they're taking them from the Iraqi army. But they're staying at their posts. They're on their checkpoints, they're guarding the roads, they're helping us identify enemy caches and such, and they'll continue to do that, being paid by the Iraqi government, until the permanent employment is found for them.

So we're going to do that smartly, too. For example, in Baghdad, we want to start peeling them off as security positions in the center of the city where it's much more secure than in the qadas, in the outlying areas, what we

call the belts, where there's a continued need to have some security in place. So they continue to do their job as SOI until we get them another job.

Q If I could follow up with a quick one. Colonel, then if you could talk to us about the PRTs. Last year we talked to a lot of the PRTs all over Iraq -- big hoopla about jobs and job training and all. Are they coming up with any jobs for these guys, or is that kind of at a standstill also? COL. KULMAYER: Well, it's a work in progress, really. The focus has been -- realize we just started the transfer in October, and so a lot of the focus, and particularly with the government of Iraq, is getting their arms around that. And so, while they're doing that we're trying to work with the other ministries to develop jobs, and the Iraqi government wants to put a lot of these men into ministries -- the Ministry of Housing and Construction, the Ministry of Education, oil police. A lot of them will go into government work. So those things are being developed and we're trying to work with the Iraqi government to create them. As far as the PRTs, it's a good place to work at the municipal level and out in the provinces to create jobs as well.

I think what you're going to see is a flat line initially while we do the building blocks for the job, and then probably in the weeks and months ahead we'll start seeing the numbers go up on those.

Right now, again, the focus, though, for the Iraqi government in particular is just to get their arms around taking control and then getting the pay straight for this 94,000 Sons of Iraq they have to take control of.

Q Okay, thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay, and David Axe?

Q Who's that?

MR. HOLT: David Axe.

Q Hi, I'm here. I just had to unmute.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Q Hi, this is David Axe with Wired, the Danger Room blog.

COL. KULMAYER: Hello.

Q Hi, can you hear me okay?

MR. HOLT: Yes, got you now.

COL. KULMAYER: I hear you loud and clear.

Q Fantastic. So, the issue of Baghdad taking over pay, does that raise any concern in the coalition in light of past snafus with Baghdad paying its own security forces, the Iraqi army especially? Baghdad doesn't have a perfect track record when it comes to keeping up with pay for its troops. Is there a concern that with the Sons of Iraq, Baghdad might fall behind?

COL. KULMAYER: No, in fact what's happening is that we're now entering our third month of pay for the Baghdad Sons of Iraq. It's two pots of money, really. It's not the MOD. Even though they are under the control of the army,

it's not the Ministry of Defense budget that's paying them. There was a special pot of money set aside in their DDR, their Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Committee of the IFNCR -- and that's a long acronym too, I-F-C-N-R, and that means Implementation and Follow-up Committee for National Reconciliation. The chairman of that committee reports directly to the prime minister, and he's been charged with the SOI integration program, and so he's been given a big pile of money to find the SOI for as long as it takes until they're provided permanent employment. And so, as far as the pay went, in October and November -- initially in October there were, you know, out of 385 separate contracts -- I guess let me explain that too. The SOI across the country is not one big monolithic SOI formation. They're divided into more than 800 separate contracts. And so in Baghdad there were 385 contracts and 383 were paid with no problem; and, two, it was just administrative oversight, that we were able to fix by the November pay period. And so now we are just starting to pay the December salaries and we're not concerned. Everyone is getting paid.

Q Okay, thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay, and Claire.

Q Sir, this is Claire Russo from the Institute for the Study of War. I am wondering if you could talk to the decision -- the decision about how the provinces were going to be transferred. It seems -- I just wonder why Anbar is going to be one of the last transferred when the program seems the most established there. And I also wonder if you could talk to the number of SOIs in Anbar, because it seems odd to me that there are so many in Baghdad and so many less in Anbar with the unemployment rate being so high in Anbar initially.

COL. KULMAYER: Sure. The order of the provinces was initially established by, well, working with the Iraqi government. When we came up with the plan to transfer them by province, the Iraqis wanted to start with Baghdad, and that's because here in Baghdad, one, it's close, and, two, they've got the Baghdad Operations Command with the very effective General Abud, who's in command. And he had a very close relationship with General Hammond, our Multi-National Division- Baghdad commander, and it just was the right place to start because, you know, they were way ahead in terms of being able to make this thing work. And even though it was -- you know, 51,000 was a big chunk to them, and so for September and October it took a lot of work from a lot of people to make it happen, but it was very successful.

And then the prime minister asked us to go to Diyala next, and, frankly, we would have preferred probably to do Diyala later because it's so complex up there, but of course we said yes. And then in Diyala in fact it's working out better than expected. We've had more than we expected come in to register; in fact, more than 100 percent. We had former SOI coming in to try to get on board with the registration program. And then we're just working through the southern provinces below Baghdad -- Wasit, Babil, Qadisiyyah. Anbar is next -- it's not last; it's next -- in February, and then we're going to do Ninawa, Kirkuk and Salah ad-Din. As far as the numbers in Anbar, the current number of SOI -- well, the number we're going to transfer is going to be about 5,000 in Anbar. It's less because the need was less. It started out -- of course you know the program started in Anbar, but the SOI themselves never really grew to more than 9,000 in Anbar. But think back; in June of 2007 is when the SOI program began. That's when we started paying our commanders and emergency response program money for these critical infrastructure security contracts. Now, prior to that -- you know, the origins of it trace really back to the fall of 2006 and end in the spring of 2007 when you had this local tribal-based

security stand up, much as volunteers, to take back their neighborhoods, but finally, you know, we saw what they were doing and wanted to work with them, and that's when we began to fund it. So the numbers in Anbar are what they are because right now there's not a need for anymore than 5,000.

Does that answer your question?

Q Yes, sir. I just would like to ask one little follow-up question, and that's if you could give me the numbers on Diyala as well, and if it seems -- I guess I'm getting more at the -- is there more concern at the government of Iraq in terms of taking in the sort of 100-percent Sunni province where these guys are predominantly former insurgents. I mean, obviously in Diyala as well, but is there concern on the part of the GOI about integrating the Anbaris? It still seems odd to me that the province, it's later in the list, you know, even after Diyala.

COL. KULMAYER: Well, the order -- everything except Baghdad and Diyala was the coalition deciding what order to put them in.

Q Okay.

COL. KULMAYER: And part of the decision of the order was we were looking at our transfers of authority for our own multi-national divisions, and we wanted to try to align the provinces where we weren't changing over personnel ourselves to make it more complicated. And, you know, Anbar kind of fell down where it did. We had initially wanted to do Anbar, in fact, in December, but because the prime minister wanted us to go to Diyala, we bumped Anbar to where it is now, and we bumped it to February so that we could at least get the registration done in January while the Marines -- the Marine units are about to change out there, so we wanted to get the registration for the transfer done before the unit that had been on the ground there for the longest time had already departed.

So it sort of -- those were the decisions that went into Anbar. It was none of the other things that you just mentioned.

Q Okay.

COL. KULMAYER: As far as Diyala, we're looking at transferring 9,000 -- just over 9,000 SOI in Diyala. Q Okay. Thank you very much, sir.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Greg.

Q Yeah, Colonel --

COL. KULMAYER: Yeah, just before you ask this question, let me just clarify a little bit on the pay. The pay period -- the pay transfer goes over two months, and in the first month or the last month of the coalition pay, it's a right-seat ride with the Iraqi army. And so, you know, they go out with us and we pay together so they see exactly how we do it and it's done together, so that then, in the next month, the first month of the GOI-led pay, it's, again, we're in the left seat and we go out there, and this time they're getting paid by the Iraqis with Iraqi dinars. So that's how we make sure that the pay is going to go well, and we rehearsed this ahead of time as well.

Q Colonel, there's still a pretty vigorous ongoing debate about how much the SOI has contributed to the decline in violence beginning in the

summer of 2007, and particularly among some of your fellow officers this debate is ongoing. And I'm just curious to your own opinion from your standpoint, your viewpoint of how much -- what was the contribution of the SOI to the decline we've seen?

COL. KULMAYER: Well, when I want to give credit to the SOI, I think that, you know, credit is due, in my view, to four different things. Why do we have such a substantial decline of violence here? And obviously the first is the greater number of U.S. forces through the surge, and the way we adopted a new COIN strategy that had both kinetic and non-kinetic lines of operation.

And then the second thing, in my view, was the fact that the Sunni tribal leaders organized to fight al Qaeda in what we now know as the Anbar Awakening, and what we turned into the Sons of Iraq. And as that awakening happened in Anbar by the summer of 2007, it had spread across the -- you know, where all the fighting was going on in the eight provinces here in central Iraq. And then of course the third thing was the -- the third thing is the increasingly capable and effective Iraqi security forces, and, frankly, better leadership on the part of the Iraqi government. And then, finally, you've got the ceasefire from Sadr and the Mahdi Army.

Those are probably the four contributing factors. But as I described before, if you look at a map -- and we like to put up a map that shows where coalition and Iraqi security force positions are, and then we lay over that where the SOI are. And the SOI tend to be a lot of dots all over the place, and that's why I used the term "they thicken the battlefield," because what they're able to do is they know their neighborhoods and they know who's who and they know where the caches are, and by securing the infrastructure and the roads and the key points, they freed up the coalition and Iraqi security forces to go on the offensive after al Qaeda.

And so, we have a chart that we like to show that as the numbers of the Sons of Iraq grew -- so you see the arrow going up to the right -- the level of violence is going down. And all those factors play in, but clearly we want to give credit -- and our commanders credit the Sons of Iraq for contributing to the security gains that we have.

Q Do the SOI have any mobility at all, or are they simply installation security?

COL. KULMAYER: Installation security. They're only armed with their individual weapon and they -- you know, they secure stretches of road, they secure key areas in towns: intersections, et cetera.

Q A quick last one. You said the 500 KIA last year, was that clashes with security forces, al Qaeda? Who's killing them?

COL. KULMAYER: Al Qaeda. Al Qaeda.

Q Okay. COL. KULMAYER: And I didn't catch your name when you came on.

Q Oh, sorry. This is Greg Grant (sp).

COL. KULMAYER: Okay, thanks. Thanks, Greg.

MR. HOLT: Okay. David Tate. Hello, Dave? Are you with us? All right, we'll move ahead. Chuck -- Chuck Simmins.

Q Hi. Good evening, Colonel. Chuck Simmins from America's North Shore Journal. I wanted to ask about biometrics. We saw a lot going out about how the SOI were being identified using biometrics. Is that technology being transferred over to the Iraqi government? And I'll have a follow up.

COL. KULMAYER: It is not being transferred to the Iraqi government. The Iraqi government has their own form of biometrics that they can use, but when we brought in Sons of Iraq, we initially took their fingerprint, iris scan, identity, and so we have that, but we're not giving that to the government of Iraq.

Q Okay. That leads me to the question of how do we know the people you're turning over to the Iraqi government are SOI, or how does Iraq know they're SOI and not just a bunch of guys that some chief, some sheik put on the payroll?

COL. KULMAYER: In August of 2008, we conducted a 100 percent accountability of all the Sons of Iraq. General Austin, the corps commander, asked us to do what we in the Army call a personnel asset inventory. And in the Army that means everybody shows up in formation with their ID card and gets counted. For the Sons of Iraq, that meant every single one of our battalions and our companies that control the Sons of Iraq went out there and validated the identity of everybody on their contract. And so we assembled a huge database of the Sons of Iraq. And then now as we transfer each province -- because time has passed since August -- there is a registration period where the Sons of Iraq will come in and fill out a form that the Iraqi government wants filled out that -- you know, their name, their education, their background, their previous experience. And at the bottom of that form it's signed by the Sons of Iraq, the contract leader, the Iraqi army battalion commander, and the coalition representative. And that validates that we in fact have the legitimate Sons of Iraq to transfer to the government.

Q Okay, and my original follow up concerned the women that are a part of SOI. We've seen several news stories about small groups of women being stood up to assist in searching Iraqi females. The Marines call it the Lioness Program. Are they being transferred over as well? Are they being dropped?

COL. KULMAYER: It's a separate -- what you're talking about -- we use the term Daughters of Iraq, actually -- Q Yeah.

COL. KULMAYER: -- to describe them. And there's about -- there's 400 right now under coalition control and another 400 or so that were part of Multi-National Division-Baghdad that the Baghdad Operations Command has taken control of. As far as those go, no, they're not being transferred in the same way as the SOI. Basically they're continuing to do their very important work because the female suicide bomb threat here is actually growing, and so they continue to be employed by the coalition and paid separately from the Sons of Iraq. In Baghdad's case in particular, they knew that we had, you know, the number that we had, and they wanted to take control over them, so they're paying them now and we're fine with that. But there's no separate transition or transfer program for the Daughter's of Iraq.

Q Okay. The Iraqis in Baghdad are paying the 400 Daughters in Baghdad but they're still under coalition control?

COL. KULMAYER: No, no, they're not. We've gone ahead and transferred them to the Baghdad Operations Command. We have another 400 Daughters of Iraq in other provinces -- Diyala and Anbar -- that are being paid by coalition funds and are doing female searches for us.

Q Okay, but they're not -- none of the 800 are part of the integration plan for SOI?

COL. KULMAYER: No.

Q Okay, thank you.

Q And, Jack, I'm back. I apologize. Dave Tate.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Dave, go ahead.

Q I apologize I couldn't get off mute fast enough. I got attacked by one of my daughters.

Colonel, good afternoon. Dave Tate with Battlefield Tourist. How are you?

COL. KULMAYER: Good, thank you.

Q Excellent. Just a couple of real quick questions. You know, a year ago September I was there when the Concerned Citizens program was kicking off, and the biggest concern back then was the integration. In fact, I considered the integration of the Concerned Citizens SOI groups into the government security forces and beyond to be one of the biggest hurdles next to Kirkuk for Iraq to get over its current issues. Can you speak at all about the reconciliation of the groups with each other, the bringing on board by the government of the SOI groups, considering just a year ago it was something that was almost -- probably not even considered to be possible. COL. KULMAYER: Yeah, and it just shows you the remarkable progress that we've been able to make in the past year, and so what we have now is a clear commitment by the prime minister and his government to integrate these men back into Iraq. And the most important part of that as far as we're concerned is the integration into the Iraqi security forces because that's a crucial measure of reconciliation and a key indicator of a return to normalization.

And so, you know, as we built the program from 2007 until we finally stopped hiring in June of 2008, during that time about 9,000 SOI were in fact hired into the Iraqi security forces, but would backfill. We would hire -- somebody would leave the program, go into the police or the army and then we would backfill them. But when we decided that it was time to draw down and turn over the program in June, we stopped hiring Sons of Iraq and now we sort of reset the odometer for the 94,000 SOI that we've had since October, and just since then, like I said, we have -- a little over 3,000 have gone into the police, and we're trying to get another class load in in the middle of January.

Essentially, the Iraqis set up an Iraqi-led screening process to ensure that the right people were going to get into the Iraqi security forces, and so we help identify the individual at the district level, and then his application goes to the provincial director of police, and then finally to the IFNCR organization, where his application is reviewed by the intel services, and then finally gets to the Ministry of the Interior where hiring orders are cut.

And so there's a lot of competing factors in this, but one is that they're not being excluded because they're SOI. The complicating factors are that they want professional Iraqi security forces and not every SOI is qualified. There are hiring caps and -- you know, in other words they've reached the number of police that they need in certain places where we have SOI, so there's not spaces for the faces that we have.

And so it's a work in progress to get them in, but we've clearly seen and have the commitment and now the follow through by the government of Iraq to integrate these men. And we're going to get 20 percent of them is our goal -- 20 percent into the Iraqi security forces.

Q Do you have a makeup by sectarian lines as to what SOI is? I know it's primarily Sunni, but do you have any idea?

COL. KULMAYER: Well, it's about 85 percent Sunni and 15 percent Shi'a.

Q And are you guys seeing any -- how much problems are you seeing between the groups? Are they integrated? Are you guys working towards integrating as much as you are having them turn over to the Iraqi government?

COL. KULMAYER: Well, I'm not sure I follow when you say "integrating." I mean, the groups are what they are. We're not seeing -- there are no sectarian problems within the SOI, and it's by exception when there's a problem that can be identified as a sectarian problem between, say, the Iraqi security forces and the SOI, or the community or the local government and the SOI. And there was a little of that going on in Diyala in August, but I think we've gotten past that. And since probably the third week in October we haven't had a single case of an SOI problem in Diyala, and so -- in fact, in Diyala in particular, last Sunday we went up there for the transfer ceremony, and so you had Governor Ra'ad of Diyala; you had the Diyala Operations commander and the Sons of Iraq leaders and the coalition forces conduct a transfer ceremony and press conference, and the Diyalan governor, you know, referred to them as, you know, "our sons of Diyala" have, you know, helped save Diyala and we're going to take care of them. And so I think you're seeing an embracement that probably nobody could have foreseen 18 months ago.

Q And you're talking about in the sense of, we're Iraqis. We're not Shi'a, we're not Sunni; we're Iraqi.

COL. KULMAYER: Right. That's right. You know, you describe them as Concerned Local Citizens. That was the original term, and then the Iraqis will tell the story -- I always thought that we had changed the name to Sons of Iraq, but when the Iraqis tell the story, when they speak to the Sons of Iraq leaders, they say, the prime minister changed your name to Sons of Iraq because that's what you are. You are sons of Iraq. We are all sons of Iraq. And because of what you've done, we're going to take care of you. And that's kind of the story that they tell them.

Q And since I'm at the end of the line I think I'm just going to ask you one more quick question just to get my history straight, because I've been a proponent of trying to get this straight in the media, and that is we had the Anbar Awakening, which was groups rising up on their own without any sort of coalition provoking, just more in the sense of response to al Qaeda. Then when the surge came, that emboldened folks, which led rise to the Concerned Local Citizens program, and we are now where we're at today. Is that correct?

COL. KULMAYER: Yeah, that's exactly right. It started in Anbar amidst, you know, the vacuum of viable provincial security and political structures, that the Awakening, on its own, agreed to establish and support security forces in the province and pursue a fight against al Qaeda. And then as we saw that happening, we decided to organize them and fund them. You know, it's honorable work, in our view, for them to stand up against al Qaeda, and they deserve to be paid for it and better organized. And so that quickly grew, in June of 2007 when we started paying the first contracts in Anbar, and by September of that year it had already spread to five other provinces.

Q And is it fair to say that because of the U.S. troop surge there, that emboldened folks to stand up, or do you think it was just money-driven?

COL. KULMAYER: No, it's because of the U.S. troops, because what they saw was the commitment of the coalition --

Q In that area? COL. KULMAYER: -- not to abandon --

Q Right.

COL. KULMAYER: Exactly.

Q Okay. I mean, that's been a big thing. There's a big mixing in the media of the Anbar Awakening and the Concerned Local Citizens program, which, in my opinion, were two separate waves of the people standing up in two different -- completely different things -- kind of related kissing cousins but different movements.

COL. KULMAYER: Yeah, I'll tell you, it's -- a term that sometimes is used on the SOI is the term "militia," and they don't like to be called militia because they don't see themselves at that. They see themselves as patriots who stood up to take back their neighborhoods and their towns and their cities. And they're not doing it for the money. It's not a lot of pay. In Baghdad it's \$300 a month. In Anbar they're only getting \$130 a month. And, you know, al Qaeda has put out messages that, you know, we'll give you \$400 a month to come back to us, and they're not going back to al Qaeda because they want to be part of the new Iraq, and the Iraqi government --

Q And Anbar was 130 (dollars)?

COL. KULMAYER: Yeah, Anbar is 130 (dollars). I kind of use the analogy that, you know, a Boston policeman gets paid a lot more than one in Mississippi. And so, you know, the thing was not top-driven and the divisions came up with their own pay scales, and so it's not uniform across the battlespace.

MR. HOLT: All right, and --

Q The Iraqi government -- I'll just follow up by saying that the Iraqi government is paying the Sons of Iraq the same amount that we are paying, so no pay cuts?

(Cross talk.)

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Q Jack, I have one more if you have time.

MR. HOLT: Okay, well, we've just got a couple more minutes --

COL. KULMAYER: Yeah, go ahead.

MR. HOLT: -- but go ahead.

Q Okay. Colonel, Andrew Lubin again. I didn't catch the end of the last gentleman. My understanding -- and I was there -- was that the Anbar Awakening started in the summer or fall of 2006 with the specific backing of Colonel Sean McFarland of the Ready 1st and Colonel Bill Jurney of Marine Corps 1/6. And then it really got successful in the fall -- excuse me, winter 2007, long before the surge started. Since we're going to be accurate -- for accuracy in media, let's go back and get it straight.

My other question, sir, with the 85/15 Sunni-Shi'a breakdown of the SOI, how many of the 20 percent transferred to the IPs and ISF are Sunnis?

COL. KULMAYER: I don't have a breakdown of that, but it's going to be the same percentage because they're coming out of Sunni areas where the police are being hired.

Q The reason I ask, Colonel, is that in the media it's been reported that the Sunnis are being shunted aside and the Shi'as are getting the ISF jobs and the vetting process takes forever or is inconclusive if you're a Sunni.

COL. KULMAYER: I would say that that's not accurate, that in Baghdad we transferred on 1 October the Baghdad SOI, and by the 9th of October we had hiring orders for 1,000 SOI out of different neighborhoods in Baghdad, and I think most of those are from Sunni areas. And then in November we got another 1,000 hired. And so, you know, the process is working.

Q Okay, excellent. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay, and has everybody had a chance here? I think we got everybody through this, and we're about out of time.

Well, Colonel Kulmayer, do you have any closing thoughts for us or closing comments?

COL. KULMAYER: I'd just like to say again, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. It's still a lot of work to do, but we're encouraged by the progress that we're making to date. And there's a lot of skepticism, particularly in the press, and understandable anxiety about what -- on the part of the SOI about whether this was going to succeed. And I think that the GOI has demonstrated that they're committed to it, and the coalition certainly is. And, you know, we're going to see this program through, and we consider it the leading edge of reconciliation in Iraq.

And I'll be happy to take any other questions. You can route those through Major Tribus here at MNCI.

MR. HOLT: Okay, very good. And so any of you -- you've all got my email address, so if any of you have any follow-up questions, send them to me. I will forward it on to Major Tribus and we'll get you all connected, okay?

Q Jack, just real quick, could you give me that quick order of transfer over, Colonel, one more time? COL. KULMAYER: You mean the order of the provinces?

Q Yeah, yeah. I just -- you spoke so fast I wasn't able to scratch it down.

COL. KULMAYER: Yeah. We started with Baghdad in October, and then on 1 January it was Diyala, Wasit, Babil, and Qadisiyyah. One February is Anbar. One March is Ninawa and Kirkuk. And then 1 April is Salah ad-Din.

Q Great. Thank you so much.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Colonel, thanks for joining us, and I hope that we can speak to you again before too long --

COL. KULMAYER: Okay.

MR. HOLT: -- to see how things are going. We appreciate it, sir.

COL. KULMAYER: All right.

Q Thank you, sir.

Q Thank you.

Q Thank you, sir.

END.