

Military Analysts Call

June 27, 2005
2E272 The Pentagon
Transcriber: Murphy
Call: On background.

I can't imagine that I could say anything I haven't said in Congress, so I'd just be happy to take your questions.

Mr. Allard: Hey, Ken Allard. After watching you on TV last week more than I was on, it was surprising to me you could even walk in there this morning.

Well, the idea I'm on TV more than Ken Allard is awe-inspiring (laughter).

Mr. Allard: Hey, last week, pal, you were.

Go ahead. Who's up?

Mr. Scales: it's Bob Scales. How are you doing?

Good, Bob. How are you?

Mr. Scales: The president is going to talk tomorrow night at eight o'clock (at Fort Bragg) and many of us on this phone call are going to be following up his comments or maybe even preceding his comments. Can you give us a sense of the theme that the president's going to have and what you would recommend to be some bullets that we could use, to – as the old expression goes – “further explain and elucidate?”

Yes. I am sorry -- I left the speech back on my desk there (laughter).

Mr. Scales: I mean a couple of bullets that we could use to, you know, as the old saying goes, further amplify?

I mean, I think that focusing on the complexities and the duration of counter-insurgencies, that these are always protracted struggles; and that our whole strategy here is to bring the Iraqi Security Forces to a level that *they* can contain the insurgency while we continue to (attrit?) and bring the insurgency down and complete the political process.

Mr. Scales: This idea of attrition is important, because several writers have said recently that in counter-insurgency or irregular warfare the object is to wear the enemy down til its presence becomes irrelevant, as opposed to achieving some decisive effect, which is maybe what the American people are looking at.

I think that's right. And I think you're going to – you know, we've said in some forms here – you're not going to see any more Fallujahs. There are no safe havens where the insurgents have basically taken over a city or a town. I mean, they're having to fight for their base, which is a good thing and as you know, successful insurgencies have always had some type of external or internal support base. They don't have that. They don't have a positive vision for the future of Iraq. I mean, they're out to get us out of there; the Sunni insurgency is trying to get itself back in power and the extremists are basically trying to defeat us and give us a strategic black eye.

Mr. Scales. Yes. That's good.

Mr. Dillon: [REDACTED] this is Dana Dillon (sp) at the Heritage Foundation. Can you talk a little bit about the negotiations that are going on?

[REDACTED] I will tell you, that London Times article – I can't tell you what exactly who that was or what it was. We're trying to run that down. But that said, the discussions that we're having with the embassy and with the members of the Iraqi government, with key Sunni leaders, are all part of enhancing the political process. And, you know, I have low expectations, certainly low expectations of any kind of major breakthrough or anything like that, but I do believe that our continued discussions with Sunni leaders between now and the elections, will also enhance the political process and bring more Sunni out to vote here both for the referendum and for the elections.

Mr. Babbin: [REDACTED] Jed Babbin. Following up on that, it seems like the word that we're getting from the press and I thought – maybe I was mistaken – but I thought Mr. Rumsfeld said something to this effect – that we were negotiating with someone who apparently was talking for the insurgents. And what I am trying to figure out is if we're talking with someone who is talking for the insurgents, who are they purporting to represent? I mean, what groups are involved – tribes, cities, whatever?

[REDACTED] As you know, the Sunni in general and the Sunni insurgency in particular is a pretty diffuse group. And I have no doubt that some of the people that we're talking to have connections to the insurgents. But I will tell you that what we find is – and so far now – this is up to now, and this may change here in the next weeks, but up to now, our experience has been that they have less influence over insurgents than they think do or that they claim.

Mr. Babbin: So if I could just follow up. What you're basically saying is we're not talking to insurgent groups regarding any sort of cease fire, we're talking about people participating in the elections. Or is that wrong?

Gen. Casey: Whenever you talk to these Sunni leaders, you always get into the tit for tat about you reduce the violence here and then we'll gradually scale back Coalition presence and all that. So I don't think it's fair to say that there's no – you know -- we're not talking to them about stopping the insurgency. I mean, that's the whole basis for the discussions to begin with.

Mr. Babbin: Thank you.

Mr. Allard: [REDACTED] Ken Allard again. Look, we had the discussion there in the Pentagon last week with SecDef. This whole issue of manpower – it's probably become a cause celebre here. It's been a long time coming. I thought it was going to come last – about this time a year ago. But it suddenly reared its head. Are you happy with the number of forces that you've actually got? Particularly when, you know, we hear the comment that there are more foreign fighters in the country now than there were six months ago? I hear something like that and I say, do we have those borders effectively sealed off or not? And do we have the manpower to do that? Can I invite you to comment on some of that?

[REDACTED] Yes. I think you know that sealing borders especially in – well in any environment, but in this environment, is difficult, if not impossible. Now, in general terms, as you can imagine, the enemy ebbs and flows. We react. We move forces or shift forces around to basically do what we think it's going to take to unhinge the enemy or to react to him. And a good example of that is last April we recognized that we weren't going to slow the insurgency in Mosul until we slowed the flow of foreign fighters in support across that northwest border. And so we moved the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment up there and about that same time, the Third Iraqi Infantry Division came on line; so now you have a border guard brigade, an Iraqi division, and a Coalition brigade out conducting operations in depth along that border. So, we do have enough forces to react and adapt. I've said repeatedly if I think I need more forces, I'll ask for them. I needed them for the

elections last year. I asked for 12,000; they sent them. And then we returned back to, you know, about 138,000.

The other thing, in this environment – and I think this is important – more is not necessarily better, because more brings with it bases that have to be guarded, lines of communication that have to be protected, and more troops out that are potential targets for the insurgents. And so our strategy is to bring the Iraqi Security Forces to a level where they can confront the insurgency so that we can actually begin reducing Coalition presence.

Mr. Scales: Bob Scales again. Could you talk a little bit again about how that's going; how Petraeus is doing. Specifically -- not just the numbers of troops that you're cranking out, but the quality of the troops, the leadership, and most specifically, how it's going with particularly preparing the new Iraqi police forces? Any comments on that?

First of all, Dave Petraeus is in really the organize, train, and equip mode and he's done a magnificent job. And I think you've heard, you know, going from one (Iraqi) battalion in the army and a handful of National Guard battalions to over one hundred army and special police battalions now. But those are formed, formed and equipped and trained to a very basic level, I mean, basic training and some (collective?) skills.

We've done two things this year since the elections to capitalize on the momentum of the elections and to capitalize on the confidence that the Iraqi people expressed in their security forces and that their security forces expressed in themselves after the elections. First was to establish partnerships between our units and Iraqi units. And the units are matched up with each other and basically they are there to provide any type of extra training assistance and support that these units need. The second is the transition teams, where we basically have put 10-person teams with every Iraqi army battalion, special police battalion, and some of the border battalions. And the intent is to increase their confidence as rapidly as possible, and to increase their access to Coalition enablers.

Our thought is get them to a level where they can conduct counter-insurgency operations with our embedded teams and with our enabling support and then gradually reduce the Coalition presence. If we get nine or 10 Iraqi divisions into the fight here against this insurgency, which is primarily Iraqis, we believe that Iraqis can defeat them with our teams and with our enabling support. But that will take, you know, a period of years here.

So – now, what's the output of that? As you can imagine, the units vary with their leadership. And we have some very good units, and we have some not-so-good units. And it really has an awful lot to do with the Iraqi leader. But, you know, that these guys are never going to make it, I don't agree with. But I do tell you straight up that there's a wide variety of capabilities in these Iraqi units. I think you've heard that we've developed a unit status report for the Iraqi military and we're doing the same for the Iraqi special police and – ultimately – local police. And that has given us a fairly good view over their strengths and weaknesses. And I'll tell you that most of them, the vast majority, are still at a level where they can either operate with us or they can operate semi-independently but with a lot of support from us.

So they're a long way from standing on their -- you know -- own two feet and fighting this thing independently.

On police. Police are about a year behind the military, particularly the local police. And that has more to do with the eight- to 10-week training program we've got them on than anything else. And, so our strategy for this year really is to transition the counter-insurgency lead to the Iraqi military, and then over the course of the next year transition that lead to the Iraqi police, so you get back to a state of normalcy here in a couple years.

Mr. Scales: OK, thanks.

Mr. Nash: [REDACTED] Chuck Nash. There have been a couple articles recently that have reported some "red on red" activity. Another article opines that perhaps the Sunni part of the insurgency have lost control of – if they ever had it – of their partners in crime there with the foreign jihadis (jihadists?). Could you comment that whole thing from what you're really seeing?

[REDACTED] Yes. I must say, those reports are primarily coming from the far west, around al Qaim (sp). We believe that they're true; and we're trying to frankly figure out how to leverage that: how to get contact with the tribes and see if there's not something that we can do to make common cause with them against the foreign fighters.

Now the governor of al Anbar who was kidnapped and ultimately killed was kidnapped by foreign fighters, and his tribe knows that. Now the fact that he was killed in an attack that we were making on the building where he was being captured is also cause for concern for them. But bottom line is we recognize it; we're trying to figure out how to leverage it, but we haven't had much success yet.

And then on the Sunni insurgency – as I said, it's a diffuse group, and that's part of the problem is trying to figure out somebody who's really speaking for the insurgency.

Mr. Nash: One follow-up if I could on that. To get in touch with the tribes to see if you can leverage that. One of the criticisms that I've heard is that our information operations campaigns seem appear kind of disjointed. Are you comfortable with the IO campaign where you are right now, and is that a sufficient enough tool for you to leverage this "red on red?"

[REDACTED] I am not comfortable with my information operation, my strategic communications campaign. You know, we lost a lot in the transition that we just did over the past few months and we're fighting like hell to get that back where it needs to be. That said, it's the Iraqis and it's the Iraqi information operations that will bring these tribes into the process – or give us our best chance of bringing those tribes into the process.

Mr. Maginnis: [REDACTED] Bob Maginnis. Two questions – one dealing with Syria and the way ahead. Have you seen over the last month any appreciable improvement from our perspective in their behavior. And also, if you could comment on the impact in Iraq of the election in Iran of the ultra conservative.

[REDACTED] On the first one – Syria remains a problem. I have seen *nothing* that they've done that has appreciably altered the flow of foreign fighters through Syria. All their information tells us that Damascus is the hub; the foreign fighters get on web sites; they get information; they travel to Damascus; they have phone contacts that they make; they're billeted; they're sent off to (Aleppo—phonetic sp?) and then farmed out to other sites. So, I mean, there's a fairly well-established facilitation at work in Syria that is moving these foreign fighters through Syria and into Iraq. And that has to be stopped. But I have seen no appreciable shift in their position and certainly no impact on the foreign fighters coming across.

I lost the second part.

Mr. Maginnis: Iran – the ultra conservatives.

[REDACTED] Yes. That's happened since I've been out (to Washington) and I really couldn't comment on that.

Mr. Lawrence: Any more questions for the [REDACTED]

Voice: Yes, [REDACTED] I've got a follow-up, it goes back to Bosnia. One of my unpleasant discoveries over there about the time you had arrived is our tactical HUMINT had not kept pace

with certain advances we'd seen in other areas. Are you seeing anything like that? Because we've also heard reports dating back more than a year ago which indicated that we had not made the same kind of progress there that we had hoped for in other areas. Have they begun to catch up with that?

They've begun to catch up with it, but not, you know, we're certainly nowhere near where we want to be. Now I'll tell you, the increased interaction with the Iraqi Security Forces has greatly increased our tactical HUMINT capability. And it's very interesting; as you can imagine, you go into a house looking for something, and then the Iraqis know just where to look; they appreciate the significance of what they find, and the people will talk to them much more readily than they'll talk to us. So at a tactical level, that's been a big boon.

The other thing we're seeing is tips. And if you look at an insurgency, you know, one of things you're always trying to get your arms around to gage the strength of the insurgency is how willing are people to give up information on them? And the tips that we are getting both through hotlines and in person have gone up significant(ly) now; I want to say on all the hotlines that the divisions have and the national hotline, we went from like 50 in January to over 1,700 in the last month. So the people are getting tired of it and they are more and more willing to come forward. So, we'll see where that goes.

Voice: one last question. Any success in taking on the suicide bombers: finding the sources of these factories, of you know, stopping them at the source – being able to kill these guys before they launch out on their missions.

Yes. There are several parts to this network. One is the suicide bomber. And so the operations that we are doing out west to disrupt their movement across are helping out. And then there's the facilitators that bring them from the border and get them linked up with the bomb and we're attacking those pieces of the network. And then there's the bomb makers, and we've picked up – oh, I want to say about 45 almost 50.

Mr. Maginnis: Bob Maginnis again. I saw a program considering the new uniform.

Hey, I'm sorry.

Mr. Lawrence: Hey Bob?

Mr. Maginnis: The uniform that covers the arms and the legs – significant extension of the current protection gear that we're using over there. Is that something that is going to soon be delivered in country...

Mr. Lawrence: Bob, Bob, this is Dallas Lawrence. Can you hear me OK?

Mr. Maginnis: Yes.

Mr. Lawrence: I am going to go ahead and let the general finish the question he was answering before, then he can get to your question if you don't mind.

In the last couple of months we picked up about, you know, 48 of these bomb makers. Bob, but there's ammunition, I mean artillery ammunition buried all over Iraq. It's almost a bottomless pick. We picked up over 1,300 major caches, tons of ammunition here in the last six months, and it just doesn't seem to go – you know, to go away. And these bombs, you know, maybe three rounds of artillery, or three artillery rounds and some home-made explosives mixed in; I mean, it doesn't take much at all.

Mr. Lawrence: Bob, go ahead with your question.

Mr. Maginnis: I'm sorry, I didn't...

██████████ I think I heard it. I'm not aware of the delivery schedule, but I am having lunch with the chief of the staff of the army right after this; but I am not aware of the delivery schedule on that increased protective equipment.

Mr. Maginnis: OK, sir.

Voice: ██████████ I've got one last question if you have time. Is there any level of violence or any strategic calculus that you can determine behind the current level of violence. Are they getting ready for some sort of Tet offensive; do you think they're encouraged by the fact that they can re-opinion polls (read opinion polls?) as well as we can?

██████████ I do. And it's fascinating. There's a perception that the levels of violence have spiked. And the reality is they haven't. Now they're up from the dip that we went into after the election. But for the last seven weeks, we've been right between 450 and 500 attacks a month. And that's about the same level where we were last year at this time. And there were weeks last year – around the time of August in Najaf, November in Fallujah and the elections, where the numbers were up seven, eight hundred, nine hundred. And my biggest question mark right now for my guys is: Can they still generate those levels of attacks? And I don't think they can. Now what they've done, obviously, is they've shifted to high impact, high visibility attacks that are murdering a lot of civilians. And they killed 700 civilians and Iraqi security forces last month and there are about 500 already this month. I mean, so they are taking this fight to the Iraqi Security Forces and the Iraqi people. But that's a losing strategy over the long term.

Unfortunately, I think as you suggest, their perceptions are that they're affecting our will at home. They can't defeat us in Iraq, so they'll break the will of the American people. And I firmly believe that that's exactly what they're trying to do.

Mr. Babbin: Well, ██████████ Jed Babbin, and at the risk of prolonging this for one more question, I mean, that's really a big question right now. We're hearing that the troops are starting to have a negative effect on their morale with all this nonsense back here with Dick Durbin and Amnesty International and the rest of these cretins out there.

Is there some sort of measurable, negative impact on morale at this point?

██████████ No, the short answer is: not yet. But as I said to somebody on TV today, I mean, the troops are scratching their heads. I mean they just, they don't, you know, they see the progress that's happening on the ground, and they don't understand what's going on back here. And frankly, it's, I'm kind of scratching my own head.

Mr. Lawrence: OK. We have time for one last question. Is there anybody else who has not asked a question, or time for one last question for the ██████████ before he has to leave.

Mr. Allard: Dallas, Ken Allard again. Not a question, but certainly a comment. I would think those last two comments of ██████████ are well worth underlining any way that you can put it out – hopefully not just on background. I think that the confusion the troops are feeling on this thing, and also the fact that there appears to be going after the high-profile targets. Those are two things I have not heard very much on TV and I'd like to.

██████████ OK. We just completed our second six-month review here. And this is basically, you know, the staff works this with the embassy staff, and the conclusion of that is the campaign remains broadly on track and we are most optimistic about progress in THE two critical areas: the building the Iraqi Security Forces and the political process. And I, my firm belief is, we will continue over the next six months to build the constitution, to have a referendum on that

constitution, and get to these elections in December. Now, they're going to contest it; they're going to fight us the whole way. But the Iraqi people are focused on their future.

And one aside here – I didn't appreciate this fully until after I'd been there a while – but if you're, if you haven't lived under Saddam Hussein for 30 years, you don't appreciate what that's like. And the Iraqis are a hell of a lot more resistance -- resilient, because they're been exposed to a hell of a lot more tyranny and oppression than, you know, than we have. So they have a little different view on this. And right now everything we're seeing points to the completion of this political process. Which will help us in bringing the insurgency to another level, but as you know, even if they finish this election, there is still going to be an insurgency next year; there's still going to be a dilapidated infrastructure that needs a lot of work. But I firmly believe that while there are -- Iraq has long-term political and economic challenges, it does not necessarily require a large, long-term U.S. and Coalition presence to get them through this.

Mr. Lawrence: Thank you gentlemen very much for joining us today. Just a quick reminder – this is on background. And again we appreciate your time this morning.

 Thanks guys.