

Military Analyst Call

Wednesday, July 20, 2005 (1600, Room 2E572 The Pentagon)

Briefers: [REDACTED]

Host: Ms. Allison Barber

Transcriber: Murphy

Subject: release of Iraq stability and security report to Congress

ON BACKGROUND

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE UNTIL AFTER REPORT RELEASE

Ms. Barber: (in progress) stability and security report in Iraq report that will be released tomorrow. I am not sure if you saw the secretary's briefing today; he did the broad strokes and gave a lot of context to this issue.

What we are going to do today on the call is this will be on background, as always, but today with a little bit of a twist it will be embargoed until tomorrow. So I am going to ask you to hold the information you hear today until tomorrow when we release the report at about 1700 and at which point we will actually send you copies of the report. Tara is here; she is great about getting you stuff and information.

So, just to refresh the ground rules: this is on background plus embargoed until tomorrow when you get the report from us which will be about 1700. So with that I will open it up – did you have opening remarks that you'd like to start?

[REDACTED] This is [REDACTED], nice to talk to you again. This is a report, as you know, required by Congress. It was in the conference report for the '05 supplemental. And they asked for, you know, indicators, performance standards, how to measure what's going on. And they were smart enough to not just limit this to security training measurements, or stability measurements, but also political and economic conditions. And I think that is, as you'll see, is a more comprehensive way to judge what is happening, you know, who's doing well, how are we doing in Iraq?

So I am going to talk a little bit about political and economic things, and then [REDACTED] will talk about the security issues, including the training and so forth. The report that's going up is an unclass report; there's a classified annex that will go along with it on some details, but let me just start with the political timeline.

I mean this, to me this is one of the most important measures of what's going on – the strategic prize in Iraq is this political process. The strategic objective of the enemy is to derail this political process because they see it as a threat. I mean, if the political process succeeds, you're isolating the extremists politically; you're splitting the Sunni, you're splitting the mainstream Sunni from the extremist. And, you know, while we hunt them down militarily we're also engaged in this political effort to – as I said – to isolate them and to consolidate what is clearly the will of the overwhelming majority of the population.

So I mean -- that's the – the political game is in fact the main game going on. And so we, in this report, talk about the political process. And January 30th was a great milestone, reminded everybody about what is really going on there and where the overwhelming majority of the population is.

Now the game as you know right now is the constitution drafting. I mean, first you had the election in January, then the government was formed, the Transitional National Assembly was formed. The main game now is constitution drafting. There is a commission in being that has been working for many months; their deadline is August 15th to produce a draft; October 15th is to be a referendum; and if the referendum is approved, then a national election in December – December 15th for a new government – a new government based on the permanent constitution.

We think they can keep this deadline; and our report, again, lays out the familiar timeline, but, the people drafting – the people on this constitution drafting commission are convinced that they can do it. They have most of a draft text already agreed. There are some very tough issues out there like Kirkuk and the nature of a federal system. But they think they can do it, and the U.N. people out there who are monitoring this think this is doable.

We think it is absolutely essential to keep to this timeline. You know in the interim constitution that-- the Transitional Administrative Law – that there's a provision that permits, you know, a delay of up to six months, but we think this would be a terrible idea because the momentum of this is -- again -- one of the weapons we have. You know, keep this process going is a blow – in fact, again – it symbolizes, like January 30th, that the strategic – that we are winning the strategic game here, and that they are utterly failing to derail this, and so the momentum is important.

So we're saying one of the measurements of, you know, who's – who's doing well there is whether this political timeline is being kept. And so we lay out – you know, lay that out here and that's, you know, our assessment is what I've said. We think this is not only going pretty well but it's really crucial.

We also lay out some other facts. I mean, there are public opinion polls in the country that show a large majority thinks the country is going in the right direction. Another good indicator – their international support is something else we track and there was a donors' conference in Brussels in June that Secretary of State Rice went to, high-level representation from all over the world. There's a donors' conference going on right now in Jordan, international contributions – economic contributions to Iraq.

So all of that is continuing, and -- and, so again, the international support that the country is getting is important, and it's worth mentioning when – in any discussion of, you know, how are we doing?

The economic side – you know, again, it's easy to measure it; it's a mixed picture because the security situation clearly is hampering, you know, the potential of Iraq, but, you know, there are clearly some important positive macro-economic indicators. It's a stable currency; I mean this is one of the underappreciated things that happened I guess very early on. A new currency which has been a success; inflation is in check.

Now unemployment is pretty high, it's about 28 percent, but we have some figures or some references to things like the formation of new businesses, private sector activity, there's some measurements of that which show there is an economy – you know, a modern economy developing. And, you know, we think this is – again, it's worth mentioning. And we know the security situation hampers it, but there it is.

We discuss the basic – some of the other basic other indicators like electricity and, you know, we think we're making some progress there; it's not as good as the demand. I mean, the demand – particularly in the summer is high, but we're meeting the goals we have set in electricity generation. Oil -- you know, crude oil production is fairly steady, exports are at 1.4 million barrels a day – again, this is hampered by security problems, but, they're earning a lot of revenue-- given the price of oil, they're earning a lot of revenue.

So we've got other statistics that are interesting. Communications – I mean, cell phones, Internet use – these things are just skyrocketing, and that's – you know, again, it's worth mentioning some of the positive things as well the things that aren't going as well as they should.

So that's – that's in a nutshell what the report has on the political and economic side, and I'm going to give you [REDACTED] to talk about the security picture.

██████ OK, thanks ██████ On the security side we really in the report cover three basic things.

First off is the influence and effectiveness of the insurgents. The second is the capacity and the effectiveness of Iraqi Security Forces. And then we also touch on Iraqi rule of law. So let me hit each one of those very briefly.

First off, on the effectiveness of the insurgents. As ██████ has pointed out, the insurgents have not been able to derail the political process. It has continued to move on, and I think that that is a key element in our success is to be able to ensure that that process continues.

If you look specifically at the number of attacks, during the recent period they have been reduced from the period of sovereignty – and we cover in the report sovereignty running from about 29 June last year until late November of last year, where we were averaging per week somewhere in the order of 530 attacks per week.

Then we got into the election period, which ran from late November until early February, and we were down in the order there about the same – 510, 515 per week.

Since then, we're down in the order of about 420 per week attacks across the board, and those are attacks on not only Coalition forces, but Iraqi forces, civilians, infrastructure – really, across the board. So there have been a significant decrease in attacks since just prior to and during the election time period.

And then we you peel that back a little bit further as to where the attacks are, 84 percent of those attacks are occurring in four provinces of the 18 that are in Iraq. So the majority of it of course are in the Baghdad, al Anbar, Ninawah, and Sula ad Din Provinces, with substantially less in the other provinces, and that's laid out in the report.

We also think that it is important to look at infrastructure. And that – in (and?) infrastructure it has significantly reduced from approximately over 40 a month during the sovereignty period to down now where we're in the vicinity of about 10 per month, because there's been a lot of focus by Iraqi Security Forces to try to maintain the infrastructure so that electricity and oil can continue to flow across the board.

The report then gets into some details on Iraqi Security Forces themselves and the numbers that we have out there. And again, you'll be able to see in the report exact numbers, but what we lay out is what has been trained and equipped—in other words, that have come out of our schoolhouse, and it talks – it gives the number for Ministry of Defense forces of 77,300 and Ministry of Interior forces of 94,000 – both of those approximate numbers. So, schooltrained, out there, doing the hard work day-to-day is about 171,300.

And you have to keep in mind that above and beyond that are some force protection or facility protection forces that are out there and then some that industries have hired as local contractors that are out there also. So these are the numbers that General Petraeus and General Casey are focusing on getting trained and capable.

The report then talks in the unclassified side about how we measure the performance of those forces that are out there, because we all understand that training continues even after you get out of the schoolhouse, and talks about the performance of the units and capability of the units.

In the unclassified side, it lays out how we assess them, and we assess them really using a technique similar to how we do in our military with our unit status reports, looking at a composition of personnel, command-and-control ability, training, sustainment, logistics, equipment, leadership, and then an overall assessment ranked into really four different categories: ones that are capable of doing everything by themselves against the insurgency – from planning, executing and

sustaining; that would be the top category. The next category are those that are capable of planning, executing and sustaining counterinsurgency operations with our help – in other words, with our folks there helping call in medevac or call in artillery, but it's generally them in the lead but with our help.

The third category is then capable of conducting counterinsurgency operations only when operating closely and along side the Coalition. This is much more with us in the lead. Still, substantial number of Iraqis there, but with us in the lead.

And then the final category is those that are forming that aren't out doing operations yet.

The report on the unclassified side does of course not give the total numbers that are in each one of those categories, because as we do not give out our readiness ratings, we do not feel that it is right to give out the Iraqis' because it really does give a lot of information to the enemy out there. But when we testify in front of Congress, [REDACTED], and is (it's?) laid out in the classified version of the report, we go through very specific numbers. And to say in general there are substantial numbers of Iraqi units both in the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Interior out doing operations on a day-to-day basis, some of them by themselves, a lot of them with them leading, and some of them with us just enabling them. They really are taking the fight to the enemy out there, and General Casey has been very, very encouraged by what they've been able to do.

And then the last part that we go through is talk a little bit about the rule of law, the fact that there have been many cases – about, over 300 Coalition cases that have been – or cases that have been tried by the Central Criminal Court of Iraq with 300 – or, over 300 convictions because some of the cases have more than one individual involved in it. Special Tribunal case – I am sure you've read – has been referred on the 17th of July, and they are establishing an anti-crime task force with FBI assistance to help investigate other terrorist activities as we go through.

But the report generally shows from the security side progress on Iraqi Security Forces being able to go out and take the fight on, and be in the lead in many cases in the country to be able to provide security and stability for their country.

And with that – [REDACTED] unless you have anything else – maybe we can throw it open to a couple questions.

[REDACTED] Sure.

Mr. Maginnis: General, Bob Maginnis. Question on the cooperation of neighbors, whether or not that's measured, because clearly Syria's sending bad people into Iraq and that's been a problem on the insurgency.

[REDACTED]: Yeah, - it is, it -- we watch it very closely. We touch on it in the report, but it really wasn't one of the things that we were asked to highlight in the report in here. I think what General – what you've heard General Casey say is that, is that, you know, he's working very hard to try to stop the flow of insurgents coming in through Syria, and – but still sees that happening out there. And I think our government has continued to push Syria to try to be very proactive, to try to stop the – that flow coming in, because it is a – it is a major source of insurgents that are coming in. [REDACTED] I don't know if you want to answer that?

[REDACTED]: It's a big political issue with Syria, and we're heading into some kind of crisis with Syria if they don't reverse it. And, it's not a border control problem. It's a problem of political decision by the Syrian government to tolerate, you know, the use of Syrian territory as a sanctuary. I mean, there's a lot of political organizing by these bad guys; there are these infiltration rat lines using Syrian territory, and this is a police state which, you know, sure as hell ought to be able to put a stop to this activity inside Syria.

Syria is not known for tolerating a lot of freelance political activity. So we think it's a strategic decision that needs to be made by the Syrian government to crack down on this inside the country. Now, they are doing a little bit more on border control, but that isn't the central issue, and that's how we've – that's how we've put it to them.

Mr. Maginnis: If I could follow up just on that.

██████████ Sure.

Mr. Maginnis: The meeting with (Prime Minister) Jafaari(?) over in Iran and Tehran last week – there have been reports about security agreements. Are we just talking, you know, security cooperation along the border, or are they involved in any training of any Iraqis?

██████████ No, I think the answer is no. It, it -- I mean, I saw the first reports, too, and got worried. But it seems to be border control, some other very practical things which seem very good, particularly if the Iranians live up to them, but no, they're not involved in any training.

Voice (██████████): That's correct.

Mr. McCausland: This is Jeff McCausland. Question for ██████████ Sir, while I take your point that the overall numbers may have gone down since last fall (from?) 530 to 420, at least the clear impression on this side of the water is the level of lethality has gone up significantly over the last few months with a dramatic upsurge in car bombings and the like and even the number of – particularly the Iraqi deaths – has gone up significantly in the last months now, I think (inaudible) heard numbers of 800 or more people killed just in the last month.

Can you comment on that? Because again, the picture again when you talk about things like Operation Lightning, which was widely bandied as an effort to cut down on particularly car bombings in the Baghdad vicinity, and then, you know, it doesn't seem to at least have (essentially?) been all that successful, based on the lethality we're witnessing. For us now to argue that things are really getting better because the number of actual attacks is going down will be, quite candidly, a pretty darned tough sell.

And then ██████████ if I could ask real – does anyone have any thoughts about on the political side – you know, one of the strange things about this insurgency, unlike any history, I think, is they don't seem to have in any way, shape or form painted a political picture on what they would do if they were successful. We seem to be their Achilles' heel. I mean, they're not encouraging the Iraqi people that they'll give them anything except more chaos. And I am just curious if you have any thoughts on that because I agree with you the political piece is the centerpoint.

██████████ Yes, well ██████████, why don't you go first, and I'll do the second one.

██████████ You are correct. The lethality of the attacks we are watching very closely because they are increasing. We are trying to work very hard to try to reduce the number of IEDs and vehicle-borne IEDs and suicide bombers. I think you are seeing a shift to more attacks against Iraqi Security Forces and against civilians out there. And, you know, if you get a couple of these that are in the right area that cause a whole bunch of casualties, they are very deadly.

I think, to answer question though, is it progress or not? You've really got to look at a mixture of both of them – how many attacks that they're able to generate, and then what are they able to cause from it?

But you've got to measure that against what is the effect also that they're having on the people out there? And all the polls that we have seen recently say that -- a couple of things, that the people of Iraq have got great confidence in the Iraqi Security Forces and see them as

professional that are out there, and that they are going to vote in the upcoming referendums and elections. So they're not deterring the people of Iraq out there.

█: On the other issue, I think you're absolutely right, I think it's a weakness on their part. It's a mixture, I mean, the hard core of the insurgency is former regime elements and I think there, if they have a political vision, it's a fantasy, a fantasy that they can somehow restore, you know, Sunni Ba'athist dominance of the country. And there's a mixture of more Islaamist types who have different goals and to that degree it's totally incoherent. So I think that's a weakness, but it also – the Sunni Ba'athist line is a minority, and it's a minority of a minority. So I don't know how they aspire to, you know, somehow gain control other than by brute force which I don't think they have the capability of.

And another way to look at it – if you look at these classical theories of guerilla war, maybe you start out with terror attacks that demoralize a population, but if you do well, then you graduate to guerilla operations and if you broaden your base, you graduate to larger unit operations. But if all these guys can do – you know, they can blow up civilians on street corners, and it's a horror, but I just sort of wonder whether, you know, from their point of view, you know, do they think they're gaining militarily or strategically? So I think at least from that perspective, you know, they have some serious weaknesses and we have, you know, it's a fight over legitimacy – every kind of, any struggle like this is a fight for legitimacy, and I think we have that weapon in our hands.

Mr. Nardotti: This is Mike Nardotti for █. You mentioned earlier on the constitution drafting there are still some tough issues, very tough issues to get through. What do you see as the toughest issues, and do they, of those tough issues, which may have the possibility of kind of derailing the process in its entirety or the time frame that you're trying to achieve, or that they're trying to achieve?

█ The two are Kirkuk, and some of the basis (bases?) of federalism. You know, Kirkuk, it was Arabized during the Saddam period and now the Kurds have unilaterally kind of done some ethnic cleansing, and so the issue is, you know, where do you draw boundaries and who do you count as a voter in Kirkuk? You know, if you draw a political map and a political system you sort of have to face up to this: Who counts as a citizen?

So they have to solve that, and that's a tough one. The other one is, you know, federalism – by that I mean what kind of – do you divide the country up into provinces and have voting by province? You remember the first election they had was sort of one, undifferentiated national electorate because they didn't have time to draw districts. And for districts you need some sort of census or some, you know, some agreed basis for, you know, deciding how many voters you have.

So -- and the issue of federalism is also how much autonomy do the Kurds get? The Kurds want, you know, a significant degree of autonomy. Federalism I think as the phrase – as the word is used now, involves a little more of national control. And the Kurds, I mean everybody else is reluctant to give the Kurds too much power, but the Kurds are in a pivotal position. You may have noticed some of the Shia'a, some of the folks in the south who were Shia'a, were thinking of forming a kind of autonomous region themselves to take advantage of whatever autonomy the Kurds got. So they have to sort out some of these macro issues as well.

Mr. Kernan: Hey █, this is Buck Kernan. Can you speak to the reformation efforts of the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Interior, and the fusion of those two ministries?

█ Yes sir. Good to hear from you. We are, of course as you know, have got advisors in both of those ministries working very closely with MNC-I and with MNF-I over there. We're seeing great progress we think in the Ministry of Defense side. We are continuing to work on the Ministry of Interior side. General Casey, last I talked to him, was very satisfied with the ministers themselves.

I think there's still more work to be done on the Ministry of Interior side linking them to the provincial police headquarters and the police elements actually out in the field.

On the Ministry of Defense side, that seems to be working really – pretty – very, well, and I think we've got a good chain of command working down through there.

Mr. Babbin: Jed Babbin for [REDACTED] Jed Babbin here. Question about the timing of the trial for Saddam. Are we concerned it may bump up against the 15 October or 15 December proceedings? How is that going to affect the Iraqi Security Forces? Are we expressing any concern to the Interim Government on that?

[REDACTED] Well I don't think we've had a concern of that kind. I think we have wanted to have some of these trials sooner rather than later, because we think it's a great, you know, the psychological and political effect it would have in the country would be very positive, reminding everybody about what this is about and showing that the new -- showing that it's a new Iraq, you know, showing the diehard extremists that the old regime is dead.

So we have just tended to want them to do it. To help them we have, you know, some Department of Justice legal people helping them with their tribunals. I don't think we've worried so much about deconfliction of – or any particular dates.

[REDACTED] If I could just – as we end, and I'm sorry, I do have to run off here, but let me go back to the casualty question again just very briefly. And although I can't give you numbers because they're classified, I think I am safe to characterize a couple things on it.

First off, if you compare it to the time of last summer and last fall, what we call the "sovereignty period," we are up in casualties – weekly average, if you will, of casualties. But where it has gone up significantly is against Iraqi civilians. And again, it's up about – well, it's up about 1.5 – 150 percent above where it was during the pre-sovereignty period. It has gone down against Coalition. And again, it has gone up against Iraqi Security Forces, but not as much as up against civilians.

So I think what we're seeing here is less attacks, but the insurgents are realizing that both Iraqi Security Forces are becoming much more capable harder targets, if you will -- they've always realized the Coalition are hard targets -- and trying to make their mark against civilians, and I think the civilians are telling them we're not going to be, we're not going to be deterred; we're going to continue to vote and we want this to move forward.

So that's – I hope that gives you a little more detail as far as the casualties.

Ms. Barber: Great. Thanks [REDACTED] Thanks [REDACTED]. And as we mentioned, we will send out the report to you tomorrow around 1700 and all this information will be embargoed til then. So thanks so much for your time on the call today.

Voice: Thanks a lot.

(end)