

Military Analysts Call

Aug. 4, 2005

Host: Ms. Allison Barber

2E572 The Pentagon

Transcriber: Murphy

ON BACKGROUND

Ms. Barber: Thanks for joining us today. We want to get started right away. We appreciate your interest and your time today. [REDACTED] thank you for being here, and for your time. And with that, just as a reminder, this is on background. We've got a couple opening statements, I think you were going to talk about a few things and then we'll go into questions.

[REDACTED] Yes, I would just briefly. Hey guys, good to be with you again. [REDACTED] here. I've got maybe three things I'd like to touch on and then I'd like to spring it open for your questions.

First, I know there's some level of interest in exactly what it was that our vehicle struck yesterday out near Haditha. It started out in first reports as a mine, then it went to IED, this morning the informal word coming out of MNF-W is that it was a triple-stacked anti-tank mine.

Voice: You guys are breaking up pretty bad. Could you say that again general, please?

[REDACTED] Yeah. I'll say it again. The explosive that the AAV struck was a triple-stacked anti-tank mine laid on the roadway. I've seen some pictures this morning. The crater looks to be seven to eight feet across and maybe three or four feet deep. So it's not one of these massive things that we've seen in the past, but significant nevertheless enough to knock the vehicle upside down and really split it open. So it's unfortunate to say that our young Marines never really had a chance.

On Iraqi battalions. I watched a program last night, and one of the commentators talked about the TWO Iraqi battalions out of 90 that are capable of fighting. That's a real distortion in my mind. There are various evaluation techniques taking place in the theater. The figure 90 is roughly accurate; I think it's probably closer to 100 or so. But of that number, four-fifths are currently fighting alongside American forces. And so I think we've got to be careful to holding them to to high a standard.

If we say that they're completely able to independently operate, that's sort of level one. But the Iraqis, in fact, don't have a logistics and intelligence – I think a sophisticated command-and-control system, and without those things they're never going to really be able to fight without us. Now those things are being created. But in the meantime, the reports we're getting back is that these guys are doing pretty doggone good with regard to small-unit tactics, you know, squad-level, platoon-level, company-level stuff. So I think we need to give credit to some young Iraqis out there that are looking out onto the horizon and trying to do the right thing.

The third thing has to do with numbers of attacks and just the lethality of all of that. It might surprise you to hear that we're seeing about 500 attacks a week or so. That comes to a rough cut average of about 70 a day. That's actually less than we were sustaining at this time last year.

Now some would say that the lethality is up. Once again, I got some figures from our J-1 before stepping over here. In fact, casualty – I'm talking killed now in action – are roughly the same from January through July of 2004, as they are January through July of 2005. Total numbers of casualties are actually down from the period leading up to the election, the sovereignty period, the election period, they're down a little bit, averaging roughly 100 or so a week.

Now, the numbers of Iraqi civilians, and the numbers of Iraqi security forces are up, and I think that reflects the lethality thing of some of these suicide bombers getting closer in to their targets, some of the sizes of the suicide VBIEDs, and so forth, and I think that you would say and our national population ought to say that we somewhat expect Iraqi security force casualties to go up as they continue get more engaged.

So I would just offer those three points to start with and then turn it over to you all for questions.

Mr. Garrett: Hey sir, it's John Garrett.

John I just lost a bet. Go ahead.

Mr. Garrett: I should know this, but the security forces, two basic groups there. You've got the several brands of police-type security forces –

Yup.

Mr. Garrett: And then you've got the military on the other hand. Are all those being trained under the oversight of MNSTCI (Multi-National Security Transition Command Iraq)?

Yes, John, they both come under MNSTCI. In fact, my deputy director is just coming back Baghdad today and he's going to go over for duty in about another month or so. He will be the guy in charge of police training. The three star has two general officers working for him, one who trains the military and one who trains the police. But both come under the heading of MNSTCI who provides for the training facilities, the equipment, the embeds, those types of things.

Mr. Garrett: Thank you.

Mr. Allard: Hey general, Ken Allard. You certainly were prophetic last month when you warned us about the higher lethality with the IEDs, that certainly seems to have been the case. What I'm wondering are two questions. Are you concerned about the fact that we appear to be setting some patterns in the tactical operations? And the larger question is, of course, having cleared these areas, and certainly Haditha is not the only one, we can talk about Fallujah, or for that matter, the airport road to Baghdad. Do we have enough forces over there to actually secure what we've already fought for? Or are we doing the same thing that we saw (inaudible) to Vietnam.

Yeah, solid copy, Ken. First of all on patterns. You know, maybe. I think it probably depends upon the tactical situation. I've got to tell you, as you look at the ground and do the analysis of that area around Haditha, you got the link to the north, very large lake, and the dam, that's somewhat restrictive that direction, you've got a built up area just west of the river, you've got

a power line and an access roadway then that leads down south, southeast from the dam, and that's where both the snipers were hit, as well as where the track took the strike.

So, to the extent that those folks were maybe operating along the same routes, avoiding the built-up population, unable to go north, I don't know. But I could – I could see where that could be the case on that particular piece of ground. You know, commanders over there stress NOT doing that of course, but in some ways it's unavoidable.

My oldest son just checked in a couple of weeks ago, he's operating out of Fallujah and he's got responsibility for MSR (main supply route)-Michigan, MSR-Mobile from Abu Ghraib on over to Fallujah. You know, kind of tough to break a pattern. You gotta be out there, you gotta be working it, you gotta be primarily anchored on those MSRs (inaudible – because?) that's where the majority of the traffic is. So how do you get creative and change your patterns when those are your taskings? That said, people are conscious of it and people realize that if you do get complacent with it, certainly bad things can happen.

On the second issue, do we have enough troops? You know, I think so, we're operating from fixed bases, mobile patrols getting out and doing the necessary saturation of the locations, one – where we think the bad guys are and then making sure they're not where we don't think they are if you'll pardon the use of a double negative.

But we are posting people where we've been more and more, Ken, in the west and these people are wearing Iraqi uniforms. And that's as it should be if we're ever going to get out of there, I think, is that those folks are going to have to assume that responsibility. So we, with them, clear it and then we build places where they can both operate out of themselves and rest with some assurance against the VBIEDs or suicide VBIEDs.

Mr. Allard: I would agree with that, because if anybody (who?) is going to alert you to hey, the other guy's setting a pattern here it ought to be those Iraqi troops.

Well, you're exactly right. You know, we had a conversation this morning with the Chairman on more ISR, but ISR in urban insurgency isn't necessarily the answer. It's much more to do with human intelligence, and that's where we've got to really capitalize on the Iraqis.

Mr. McInerney: Tom McInerney.

Yes sir.

Mr. McInerney: It appears to me, I mean following up on this question, is our shortage all along has been intelligence. It isn't the size of the forces we have, it's intelligence, and of course, you tie that in with the rat lines in from – in Syria, the support from Syria. So I am kind of asking you two questions. Do we really have good enough intelligence, the HUMINT, to react with the operative intelligence? And then, of course, what do we do about Syria? That's always going to be a problem til I believe you're given cross-border authority and other covert abilities. Could you comment on those points?

[REDACTED] Yes sir, I would. You know, I would have answered the question on intelligence very differently six or eight months ago when I was there, because we were just NOT getting the available HUMINT that we needed to do the jobs. And part of that was that our (HET? – HAT? Humanitarian assistance teams?) teams couldn't get out, couldn't do the civil affairs things that sort of lead to those types of opportunities when you mix with the civilian population.

It is quantum better now. I've seen some charts coming out of theater on the numbers of HUMINT reports, hotline reports on a national hotline, local reports that are being given -- more to the Iraqis. And that's the beauty of getting these forces out there with us, is that they're, you know, they're pretty proud of their Iraqi boys. They've got about a 75 percent approval rate with the military and the police. And the people that want to see the country eventually stabilized realize that that's how it's going to happen, and these bits of HUMINT are given to these guys, and of course they take advantage of it.

There was a figure – it's probably about 30 days old now, but there was a 10-fold growth in the numbers of hotline reports when it was open nationwide. And I think a lot of this has got to do, again, with the growth of the Iraqi security forces.

Syria is a problem. And they're doing some, but I think it's in everybody's belief that they can and should do more. And I think there will be continual pressure to bear, both internationally and certainly on the part of the Coalition forces to try to get them to do more.

You know, but that said, I think there's some thing that can be done on the Iraqi side of the border as well, personally. I tend to think that if we're going to say that it's a priority that we shut down the rat lines, and if we are concerned that there may be a higher percentage of foreign fighters coming in, then there are some things that need to be done on the Iraqi side without starting another front, if you know what I mean. And I think that the Iraqi government and probably our people there are starting to come to grips with that.

There's not a problem down on the Kuwaiti border with people coming across. And that's because there's an electrified fence, there's a tank ditch, there's a 30-foot crevice in the earth, and there's about three kilometers of standoff between those things. So, you know, at some point if we get serious about constructing border obstacles out there I think we can help ourselves a great deal.

Border (points? Ports?) are going up, but probably not at the rate that you or I would like.

Mr. McInerney: Aren't we going to have to do something covertly in Syria? I know no one wants a new front –

[REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Mr. McInerney: But the fact is it certainly sends a signal that even if given cross-border authority to the Multi-National Forces sends a signal to the Syrians they've got to do more. I know we've been reluctant to want to do that, but I think you're fighting with your hands tied behind your back.

[REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Mr. McInerney: I understand.

██████████ OK.

Mr. Maginnis: General, Bob Maginnis. A two-part question. One has to do with the 17 alleged al Qaeda that were arrested in Jordan the last couple of days, (mostly threatening?) our interests over there. Are we seeing that sort of thing in the neighborhood out of Iraq in a sustained level, increasing or decreasing? The second part is in Basra, and the Shia radicals increase. At least, the murder of this young journalist the other day, what he wrote about suggested a corrupt police and that there was a lot of influence from next door Iran. Can you comment on either one?

██████████ You know, I'm not familiar with the specific incident of the 17 arrested in Jordan, but it's starting to follow a pattern. You know, the way that we're going to win this larger global war on terrorism, men, I believe is through empowering the moderates. And I think that some of the other countries in the region are starting to get it. You all may or may not have heard that there was a convention of 12 Arab countries taking place right now at Sharm el-Sheik (?) in Egypt. And to me, that is a very symbolic gesture that we're starting to have it up to here with the extremism and at some points the moderates are going to have to take charge and get us out of this situation we're in.

So it's not surprising at all that nations in the region who have come together at other conferences and sworn support to Iraq would say, hey, we've got people that are being farmed in our own countries, to be brought into Iraq, to be some of these suicide bombers, and it sort of starts there.

And so, I know we've been making the point that you all can help us with that, and in this instance, I'm glad to hear that they may be.

In Basra, certainly the incident with the American journalist I think is a story unto itself. Apparently he had written some things critical of some folks down there. That's a dangerous thing to do when you travel unescorted and stay in places where he was staying.

But beyond that, you know, there are some very wise Iraqis that I've sat with in Baghdad who've said our first problem is the insurgency, our second problem is the Iranian influence that's gotten into our country since the war. And they think they're going to have to root it out of the country and of the politics without going to civil war. And they're wrestling with how they do that.

There is, of course, much more support for a very strict government in the south than there is with the Kurds or with the Sunnis, and Basra I suspect is pretty much the center of that. You could argue that Najaf is sort of the second seat, again, with the religion associated with that city.

Beyond that, I can't talk to it. You know, I think that you also have moderates there say that that may be the Shia preferred form but we're going to have to come together with the Kurds and the Sunnis to make this whole thing work and so it can't be all one or the other.

Mr. Babbin: General, Jed Babbin. To follow on kind of on parallel with what Tom was asking about, do we have the cross border problem as bad from Iran as we do with Syria?

██████████ You know, we had an incident just this last week where some smugglers fired on the Iraqi border patrol and left pretty much unimpeded. I think that we don't have as significant a problem with regard to foreign fighters coming in from that direction. Some of the technology that we spoke about previously with IEDs I do think came from Hezbollah by way of Iran. Actually, those devices are being found more in the Shia communities right now than they are in the Sunni, and that's somewhat encouraging because, again, they haven't proliferated.

But no, I don't think we're seeing the numbers of foreign fighters coming across. Other untoward types of influences, absolutely. But not the rat lines that were referenced by the first or second question.

Mr. Babbin: Thank you.

Mr. Nash: General, Chuck Nash. There was a question in an article that appeared yesterday about the sniper teams – the two sniper teams that got interdicted. In the article there were two scenarios. Neither one of them made much sense to me and I'm asking if you could clarify this if you know at this point. And that is, one scenario was that the teams were basically surrounded up on the top of a hill or a mountain, asked to surrender, and according to the article the bad guys said they didn't surrender, so we killed them.

The second scenario was that they were walking through a neighborhood and were ambushed. Neither one of those scenarios sounds plausible to me; one, the first one because they would have called in air support, and the second one because as far as I know, Marine snipers don't stroll through neighborhoods. So what happened there? Do we know yet?

██████████ Chuck we don't know yet for sure. And we may never know because they were not in radio contact and I am not sure the forensics of the site are going to give us an exact portrayal. We'll probably capture some of those bastards sooner or later and then story may come out, if we can believe it.

I'll tell you what we do know and, once again, it's not a lot. Two teams moving together, a third team out moving independently. They were in radio contact with each other, but they were not transmitting at the time that these guys were taken under fire. The third team reported that they heard a sudden burst of fire lasting five to seven seconds and then silence. Now, at that point we can only offer conjecture. I will tell you that they were not in a built-up area. I've seen an overhead of the grid coordinates. It was open terrain. I've flown over that terrain any number of times. It's, again, on the east side of the river pretty much south, southwest of the Haditha Dam and therefore – I'm sorry, south, southeast of Haditha Dam and southeast of Haditha. Pretty much open ground.

All we can offer in terms of conjecture is probably one of two things. Either they were taken under fire by a very well-laid ambush and they just didn't have a chance, or Iraqis got in close. And I wouldn't want to do more conjecture on what type of Iraqis, how they may have been dressed, what words might have been exchanged, if any, those type of things.

What I can tell you is that they were not overrun by 30 or 40 guys that got out of pickup trucks a couple hundred yards away and came at them. In open ground like that these guys would have nailed a dozen or more. They're great shots and that ground lends itself to that.

We had an instance when I was [REDACTED] where we lost a couple sniper teams on top of a building in Ramadi. And we found after some weeks that there was an Iraqi construction crew that was working in that building and they had fed and watered these guys on two or three separate occasions previously. On the third or fourth time they came up with pistols in their belt bands, when the Marines got occupied, they shot them. So, something like that – I don't know, I simply don't know and we probably shouldn't offer conjecture. But that five second -- 5-to-7 second thing I think points towards one or the other scenario.

Mr. Nash: OK, thank you.

Ms. Barber: We probably have time for one more question, if there's one more to have.

Mr. Nash: If I could, Chuck Nash again. This battalion out of Ohio. You take the snipers and the IEDs, that's 21 Marines out of small battalion. We were chatting before you came on the line about, you know, where the D-Day memorial is in Virginia. That is a tremendous sacrifice from that area. Could you tell me, what is the Marine Corps – I know this is out of your Joint hat – but what is the Marine Corps doing to address those families, the state people there?

[REDACTED] Yeah, Chuck, I don't know yet. I suspect there will be some things. I know yesterday morning the Marine Corps was augmenting its (CACO teams?) to try to make sure that we got words to the families as rapidly as we could without delay.

They were contacting congressmen, and congresswomen actually, in the areas where these folks were from, hoping to marshal some additional support I think, and do the courtesy thing. This goes back to Civil War days when you had, you know, large chunks of units that were killed almost at the same time, so it's almost unprecedented in terms of recent warfare.

There will be more, I'm sure. What, I don't know at this point; I guess it's just premature to say. But certainly, as, you know, as everybody that's talked on it has said, our hearts and prayers go out to the community because it's got to be a shock.

Mr. Nash: Thank you.

[REDACTED] Hey guys, one point I would close with if I can. You know, I – there's a great article I didn't get to finish reading today but I sure got the gist of it. I think it's in the Wall Street Journal. You know you got Zawahri here all over the air waves today; you've got the events over the last couple days and these people trying to take credit for it. You know, it's absolutely terrible that we lost that number of Marines over a two-day period and they were the tactical target, but the strategic target remains our population. We can lose people day-in and day-out, but they're never going to beat our military. What they can and will do if they can is strip away our support. And you guys can help us not let that happen.

Voice: General, I just made that point on the air. The way that I think you can help us in that cause is to simply underline those points in unmistakable terms every chance you get.

 Let's work it together, guys. Thank you.

Ms. Barber: Thank you.

Voices: Thank you. Take care.

Call ends.