

Transcript: Military Analyst Call
Friday, Dec. 23, 2005, 0930

re U.S. troop adjustments in Iraq
Portions on the record; **PORTIONS OFF THE RECORD**
OSD Public Affairs, Room 2E556 The Pentagon
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... Folks that I think are tuned in this morning, pretty much the normal list of suspects. And again, we'd be happy at any point here when we've finished to take your questions, and we'll take as long as we need to.

What I would like to do is split the time this morning to the extent that we can. I would like to pitch to you all for about 15 minutes, both the essence of what's taking place and then some points that I would have for you that I think would help you with your analysis, and then use the rest of the time to go ahead and answer your questions.

First of all, I don't think it's a surprise to you at this point with the secretary having announced and with some articles having appeared as early as a week ago, but certainly in the papers in this morning that the 2d Brigade, 1st Armored Division, out of Schweinfurt, Germany, (note, DoD release says Baumholder) will be prepositioned on its gear in Kuwait, serving as a call-forward force.

The Army has been busy prepositioning the equipment of an armored brigade, analogous to what we used to have there I guess before OIF. That equipment is generally arriving and will be in place this month, and that's what the 2d of the 1st Armored is falling in on; they will be again in this call-forward status for an undetermined period of time, based on some recommendations that are going to be coming from the secretary from the commander of CENTCOM.

Okay, secondly – and more in a moment about this call-forward status. Secondly, the 1st Brigade of the 1st Infantry Division, out of Fort Riley, Kan., was notified, oh, mid-November or so that they would be in delayed status pending their deployment to Iraq. They were told to enjoy Christmas and their status would be provided to them shortly after Christmas and after the first of the New Year.

They were scheduled to arrive in Iraq – actually in Kuwait -- on 13 December with the latest arrival date, and then to be in Iraq and ready to transfer authority on the 12th of January.

Their status is being updated by virtue of the orders the secretary has signed, and they will not be deployed to Iraq as a brigade. Again, that's one of the points that I want to raise with you, in the points that I want to make.

And let me get into those points now. There are four of them, essentially. The first deals with the 1st of the 1st Infantry. As I said, they will not be going into theater as a brigade, but elements of the brigade will be deploying to Iraq – and or as it turns out this morning, perhaps, a small number into the Horn of Africa.

What's intended for the brigade, and this is based upon Army decisions and who's best available, who's best trained (up on step?) and that type of thing, is that the brigade will provide seven or eight security companies that will perform security roles – convoy escorts, those type things – in and around Iraq as a part of their number.

The brigade is also tasked with providing a number, I don't know how many, frankly, at this point, but a number of the transition teams that will work with Iraqi forces and continue their modernization and professionalism efforts, and also the brigade headquarters has been tasked

with the training of Army transition teams, and perhaps even other Service transition teams, depending upon their makeup.

But those are the three functions that the brigade will be performing now over the next year or so, again, with certainly a portion of them going into Iraq.

Now, I would add that it is still a net plus in terms of the total numbers, okay? Because they are going in as security companies, somebody else is not going, okay? So this isn't a shell game, certainly, in that context, it's just that these people are, again, readily available; they're more prepared than some of the other companies from the other units that might be tagged a later point in time.

Let me talk to you some about the math, okay? Simplicity says that until about August, and for the several months leading up to that, we were about 138k as what we call the baseline force. You all are well aware, because you tracked it, that we started to bump up at that point, first for the mid-October referendum, and following that, of course, the mid-December election, and peak numbers went to about 160,000.

Now that was obviously for the election; we've done that before and every case we've come back down to baseline, and that certainly is the intent this time.

Simple math would say, okay, we go back to about 130,000, two brigades, 3,500 each, that's about 7,000, so we'll be at 131, right? Well, the answer is no, that's not quite right. And the reason for that is since about August of last year, we've been looking at transition requirements to hand over this fight, and ultimately, security responsibilities to the Iraqis. And we've been providing to them, since about August, the numbers of people that will be necessary for transition teams – these 10-, 12-man elements that will be working with the Iraqi units, with combat support – combat service support types of people that will strengthen that Iraqi capability, and eventually allow them to do it themselves as opposed to us doing it for them; detainee operations types of folks that will train and assist the Iraqis in taking over this function as soon as we can hand it off to them with new facilities built in some cases, old facilities being rehabbed and or, again given over to Iraqi control.

So, what you see is some growth in terms of those transition capabilities that offset that simple math I posed to you earlier. We think right now that the essence of it will be a reduction of 3(000) or 4,000 troops from that 138, but quite frankly, that's a projection. We are talking about March by the time we would get everybody out of theater and stood down that were there for the election, and of course, that's three months-plus hence from this point.

But I just want to caution you all that some of the things that you may have heard or even have seen in the paper this morning, unfortunately, are not precisely correct, and you all need to be able to talk to that I think intelligently when you see it.

The third point I would make is on the 2d of the 1st AD. General Abizaid has his strategic reserve; it's the MEU. General Casey's operational reserve if you will is for all intents and purposes the 2d of the 1st AD. But we're choosing not to call it that. It's being labeled a "call forward" force, and if you all would be explicit in your terminologies when addressing it, that would help us with regard to what we do here.

Now, how long they're going to be in that capacity, again, that remains to be seen. We know they are there for at least 90 days. You all understand, of course, there's routine assessments and decision points that are being exercised by the commander in theater. He is simply going to have to watch the situation to see how long all or portions of that brigade need to stay in Kuwait. So I think we'll leave that with simply the byline more to follow.

The last thing is that I would emphasize is that this all is coming about as a result of Iraqi progress. I mean, right now, the numbers are at 216,000 trained and equipped; 120-plus Iraqi army and police battalions in the fight; 44 of those own ground as we speak here this morning; that number is going up to 50 or so by the end of January. Seven brigades that are providing leadership roles right now in that; two division headquarters; that number of brigade headquarters will go up to 11 or so by the end of January. So it's a northeast trendline in terms of the Iraqis, both coming on line and assuming control of ground and battle space as they are able to do.

And again, that's how General Casey, General Vines, General Abizaid, the secretary and the chairman are all able to arrive at the decision that has now been made.

I would emphasize to you that it's done in a military chain of command that goes all the way to the president; it is not based on political events. And that's all as a military man I suppose I need to say about that.

Okay, that didn't take a full 15 minutes, but that just gives us more time for questions. I'll be happy to field anything that you guys have.

Q: This is Jeff McCausland. Two quick questions. On the 1st of the 1st, you said that they are going to be training the transition teams. Will they be doing that back at Riley, the international training center, Kuwait, Iraq, where will that occur? And on the 1 AD brigade, when will they actually close in Kuwait with troops and equipment, and then lastly, any comments about the future if things go well at the end of spring?

Well, first of all in terms of the training, you know, I think, and I'll have to confirm this for you, but I think it's going to take place at home station in Riley. That would certainly limit the logistics requirements of going elsewhere to do it. I can tell you it is not going to take place in theater. It is going to take place in the United States.

In terms of the 2d of the 1st AD, they're there. They had an LAD (latest arrival date) in Kuwait late November. They made that. They have been essentially there doing training, doing commanders' reconnaissance; some of their leadership I think went into Iraq just to expedite the process if they were called forward. They have essentially satisfied all of those what we call RSO&I requirements that allow them now to deploy quickly if the event should necessitate that.

In terms of what will happen down range Jeff, I mean, it just depends. This has always been situation based, and we are going to have to read the situation as it develops. Right now there's some pretty positive trend lines out there compared to what we saw during the referendum in terms of casualties, in terms of numbers of attacks, in terms of VBIEDs, suicide VBIEDs, those types of things. If those things continue in a positive fashion, and Iraqis continue to show that they can manage it, then I think there's probably good news to follow. But that will be dependent upon General Casey's assessment when those things pop on to the calendar.

Q: Thank you.

Q: Hey General, Jed Babbin. We heard from General Casey, and I guess more recently from the secretary, that we're trying to balance things between providing the Iraqis with the support they need and not creating in them a dependency on us to do all of those things. I understand the concept. Give us a couple of points – you know, how do you make the judgment? What do you balance one against the other in terms of trying to not create that dependency?

Yeah, Jed, I think that's a good question. And it's a finesse question in a sort of way, because it just depends on what you're dealing with at the time. I mean, clearly, just like in our military, some Iraqi units are better than others. But as they are able to step up, we are pretty much requiring that they do so.

I can tell you that in the reports this morning, that there's the first what they are calling Iraqi brigade-level sweep that's taken place out in the Euphrates River Valley. There's a Marine rifle company out of RCT-2 that is there as observers. But these guys conceived of it, planned it and executed all on their own. So that's the type of growth that we see and that we want to encourage. And I think there's a belief on the part of our military and certainly our leadership that, you know, some of these units will be reticent to step forward unless you absolutely compel them to do so, but that's our responsibility to both train the Iraqis as job one, conduct the necessary counterinsurgency as job two, but to make sure that that first job is understood and executed as soon as we can make it happen.

Q: Great, thanks.

Q: This is Jeff McCausland again. One other question – on the transition teams – what's in the future? Is that going to be Army-Marine, or is that going to be solely Army?

Jeff, actually it's all Services. The guys who are out doing the close combat kind of stuff is clearly Army and Marine. But what we've seen is the direction, and subsequently the willingness, on the part of the Navy and the Air Force to step up where they can. So some of these transition teams are base -- facilities (base facilities?) training teams; some of them are logistics training teams. So where it's plausible that a transition team can work to do the type of things that we find resident in the Air Force or the Navy, again, those Services are stepping up big time to help relieve some of the stress on the two ground Services.

But clearly, where there is a ground combat role, and that extends out to the border transition teams -- the special police and the police transition teams -- you are going to find most of those are Army and Marine.

Q: Hey, Tom McInerney.

Yes sir.

Q: How are we coming, particularly with the MEF, of impressing upon the Sunnis that the U.S. and the Coalition forces are there last great hope, that if they continue the insurgency then, you know, time will just force us to turn it over the Kurds and the Shi'a to solve it for them, and we can help them more than anybody with revising the constitution, economic resources, positions in the cabinet. Are we making progress with them?

Tom, I think so. I see some really positive signs, without sounding overly optimistic. One is just the turnout of the Sunni vote. I think they realize that they hosed (?) it last time, and they are not willing to see that occur that way this time around. So that's I think a positive sign.

Secondly, you know, we're actually seeing some red on red, in and around Ramadi, and out on the western border. The -- some of the bad guys have really had it with the AQI folks in Ramadi, and there are fights taking place there, there are threats, there is intimidation -- on both sides, really. But it's the old thing the enemy of my enemy is my friend. And although these, you know, FRE (former regime elements?) and former Saddamists aren't going to really befriend us in ways that we are seeing out west, we still see that as a positive thing, and I think a realization on the part of those folks, that, you know, the final solution here is going to be political, not kinetic.

The other thing is that out on the border, one, the border posts are now in place and manned up, so we think we can start to throttle, you know, some of the numbers that we've seen coming across, but secondly, you've got tribal sheiks out there that have fought the AQI previously, who are offering their young men to join the military in a militia-sort of way; we call them Desert Protectors. And we've got three platoons of those folks out and about. And they are providing a good bit of intelligence; they're helping of course with the security role; and it's a good tie

between sheiks out there that weren't necessarily favorable to the Marines in the west that are now by necessity caused to work somewhat in sync.

Q: And have some of them continued with the cease fire they put in during the election?

██████████ You know, I think we're probably, certainly the ██████████ we're going to start to see the numbers of attacks go up some. There was never really a cease fire; I think that was perhaps a little misunderstood. I think there probably were some discussions taking place, but those aren't new. I mean, I had those when I was out there, and these guys can never quite come across with the goods. We said, hey, show us your power by cutting off the attacks and we'll start to believe that you speak for large numbers of people.

They were never quite able to do that. And although I think there have once again been discussions this time, nothing that approached a cease fire, and attacks still did occur, so – although they were somewhat diminished. And these people did help us in securing the polling sites.

So, I don't know that there's a one-for-one return on the effort, certainly one that we'll continue to see as we approach the new year.

Q: Thank you.

Q: General, Bob Maginnis. On the Horn of Africa, you indicated in your explanation of the first point that the 1st of the 1st of course isn't going over in its entirety, but elements might go to the Horn of Africa. Are we growing, or is this a replacement effort in that area?

██████████ Bob, I'll be honest with you, I don't know the answer to that. The information I gave you is about 30 minutes old. When I stepped in the Army had actually reduced the number of security companies that were going to be headed into Iraq, and included in that number was one for the Horn of Africa.

I will tell you that we are trying not to grow it; that's the thrust. It's an economy of force mission, and any request for forces that come in from there are very closely scrutinized, so I am going to have to dig more into what they see is this requirement. I do know there's a security effort there that is existent in Djibouti at the base. Whether or not these are guys that are just scheduled to go in and rotate them out, I can't say for sure.

We are not providing a lot of security elsewhere with regard to convoys and that type of thing. So, I would say 60-40 that they're replacement, but I can't say that with 100 percent assurity.

Q: Thank you.

Q: General, Tim Eads. Could you give us a little background on the timing of this announcement? I mean, is it based almost exclusively on the capability of the Iraqi forces to step in, is there something else in play – you know – the election was less than a week ago. Some may think it's strange that we are announcing troop withdrawals before the government has stood up.

██████████ Yeah, Tim all those things certainly went into consideration. I can tell you that there's been discussion on this now for some time, but that the election hanging out there was a major consideration in terms of the announcement. You know, we needed to see – we were getting reports, of course, that the bad guys were going to try to disrupt and eradicate, you know, the success of the election as much as they could. That obviously didn't happen. I mean, you had a huge turnout and the ability of the Iraqi forces to defend it was just excellent.

So, it was believed that we would wait and see how all that panned out before there were any real announcements of the decision, and that's essentially what you see here. Now, we realize that if

you look at what happened recently with this interim government that it took, some would argue, 90 days or more to stand up. We're hoping that doesn't happen this time; time will certainly tell. And I think there's a lot of backroom discussion, a lot of tea that's going to be drank before this one really is settled out. But, I think people would say that we all lost momentum when they took, you know, so long to put it together. That's a lesson learned and we just hope it's applied as they bring this one around.

Q: Thank you.

Q: General, this is Jeff McCausland. I'm sorry. One more question. While I fully am more than happy to use this phrase call forward force as opposed to operational reserve, and I am sure all my colleagues will be happy to do that as well, could you kind of tell us why you want to do it that way? I mean, all of us are comfortable with operational reserve, makes sense in terms of military terms (crosstalk).

BEGIN OFF THE RECORD





Q: Thank you.

██████████ Okay, I thank you for joining us, gentlemen. Is there anything I need to follow up on?

Q: (Jeff McCausland?) (inaudible) verify training sites (inaudible) Riley, that might be helpful.

██████████ Wilco.

██████████ Hey guys, great to be with you again. Have a wonderful Christmas. We will be talking to you again after the New Year.

Q: Likewise, sir.

Q: Thanks general.

Q: Great rundown.

Q: Thank you very much.

(call ends).