

Military Analysts Call  
Thursday, March 16, 2006

**On Background**

Hosts: Mr. Dallas Lawrence, OASDPA, Ms. Tara Jones, OASDPA

Room 2E556; [REDACTED]

Transcriber: Murphy

Lawrence: (in progress) **the entire call will be on background. You are free to quote the source as a senior military leader, but other than that, it's on background,** and General [REDACTED] should be calling in shortly.

(break to wait)

The show is yours, sir. We have gone over the ground rules. Our folks know this call is on background, and we appreciate you joining us this evening from Iraq.

[REDACTED] My pleasure.

Lawrence: General, if you'd like to kind of give an opening overview of the current status of forces, what the successes your folks are seeing there, anything you'd like to discuss, then we can open it up for questions.

[REDACTED]: Yeah, I think I would. But I will keep it brief, because I would rather just field the questions that they are interested in.

First of all, hello to all of you. Most of you have been over here at one time or another. I am just crossing my 21<sup>st</sup> month in Baghdad, 14 the first time and seven now. So I've got a bit of a, it seems to me, a historical perspective on this whole thing.

And what I would say in general terms in that regard is that although the generation of the combat forces, the more than 100 battalions of Army and police battalions that are out there get most of the notoriety, the – it seems to me that the – an equally important story is the institutions that are being built above it, that is to say the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior, as well as the – kind of the foundation of the whole thing which is an education system, an Iraqi training and doctrine command that includes 18 institutes, academies, colleges and training centers so that this force we are building will be two things principally – three really. One is capable, clearly. But the other two are one that is an institution from top to bottom, from foot soldier to minister, and even more important than that an institution of national unity, that is, a cohesive force inside the country at a time when they clearly need some cohesive forces working on their behalf. And I think there's been some reasons to believe that that endeavor and that entire enterprise is moving in that direction.

And with that, I will say only one other thing, and that is I know nothing, literally, about Operation Swarmer, so if you will stay clear of that, I would be happy to answer your questions.

Q: General, this is Jeff McCausland. Good to talk to you again. Could you talk a little bit about that national unity function? Of course, there's been various reports after the bombing of the Golden Mosque (22 February in Samarra). And in general, the ones I have read seem to be summarized by saying the Iraqi security forces, the army, performed quite well; in fact, they deployed rapidly and were a settling influence, however, that the police forces were somewhat mixed results in terms of that whole being cohesive, being identified as a unifying force, et cetera.

Could you talk a little about those events, and those two different parts of the security force?

Sure. In general terms, I would say that the army and the national police – and the national police, by the way, used to be called when you were here last time the special police – and consist of the commando division and the public order division, those national forces, we have more visibility on them than we do the local police, but – performed very well. They were very deliberate; they were poised. I would describe their activities as a settling – clearly a settling influence on what was essentially a very emotionally charged atmosphere.

There were reports of certain units that chose not to confront armed militia, and there were some armed militia activities that cropped up, notably the (Muqtada Sadr's) Jaysh al Mahdi in and around Sadr City. But frankly, they didn't have much political top cover to do so. In other words, there was a conscious decision taken at the national level not to exacerbate the problem by handling two problems at once, you know, you've got the emotionally charged atmosphere of the mosque and the religious undertones of that and the decision was made not to confront militias, but rather ensure that they were not acting in criminal ways. So, for example, there were a couple of mosques that were taken over by militias – the militia of course claimed – and it may be true -- that they took them over in order to protect them – but when the legitimate forces went and said, okay, we got it now, they -- in every case -- they dispersed.

There were other reports about armed groups moving through the streets, you know, shooting their rifles in the air and things that over here are somewhat common place, I don't want to diminish that, but in every case, again, the legitimate security forces had a leveling effect on all that and kind of channeled all this excess energy.

Now we're still in the – this is all very recent, so we're still in the process at some level of accumulating our lessons learned. And there were a couple of instances where local police in particular, I am not talking about the national police or the national army, but the local police may have, you know, turned a blind eye to some things. But frankly, I saw this as a watershed moment for the Iraqi Security Forces, and they not only passed the challenge but did so very well.

Q: General, Jed Babbin. Thanks again for hosting us when we were over there in December. What can you tell us about the militias infiltrating the legitimate forces and we hear all sorts of goofy reports about people coming in and sectarian violence coming out of some of these forces.

First of all, let me go from the latter part of your question to the former. Make no mistake about it, there are intelligence reports on a frequent basis that cause us to be concerned about the activities of pieces of the legitimate security forces, never an entire unit, but rather an individual or two or three or 10, maybe, inside of a legitimate unit. And we've got a system in place with our Iraqi counterparts to investigate those. And we have on, I don't know, in the last six months or so, we've had the occasion to change commanders of battalions in both the army and the national police – again, the commandos and public order.

We've also changed a number of brigade commanders because there was enough evidence they were not exerting the kind of control and discipline over their force they needed.

But again, this is probably two or three battalions out of 100 or so in the army, and one brigade out of eight in the national police and two battalions out of 24 in the national police.

So, I mean, you know, it's significant, but not anything that would me to describe this as an endemic problem.

Now, back to the issue of infiltration. This is one of my favorite words, naturally. And it's hard for me to sign up for infiltration when we talk about the legitimate, that is to say, the governmental recognized militias – you know, the peshmerga, the Badr and seven others are identified in CPA order No. 91 as legitimate militias that must be over time disarmed and/or assimilated into Iraqi society and even the Iraqi Security Forces.

So we clearly have had former Badr Corps, former peshmerga come in to the security forces as individuals, intentionally. In fact, in some cases we've taken inputs and allowed them to be recruited intentionally that way as part of an assimilation process. The key is not to have them all in one place, and the second key is to have the leaders of units be diverse, and have the MITT (Military Transition Team) teams that overwatch them be sensitive to these kind of things and also the special police transition teams as well.

Now there are other militias, let's even be less specific, and call them armed groups out there that are more problematic. And I mentioned the Jaysh al Mahdi as one of them, because it's not a recognized militia by the CPA order No. 91.

Secondly, many of the young men that tend to drift toward Jaysh al Mahdi are uneducated, almost universally unemployed, and as a result they can't even get into the legitimate security forces because the legitimate security forces have a recruiting standard and generally they can't pass it. So they pose a little bit different kind of problem.

But infiltration is probably less precise than it ought to be, given that in some cases these men are actually invited in.

Q: Hey [REDACTED], Bob Scales, how are you doing?

[REDACTED] Hi, Bob, good to hear from you.

Q: Listen, I am intrigued by your description of a building of an institutional part of the army, a sort of TRADOC if you will. Are you actually building things like academies, staff colleges, war colleges, NCO academies, things of that sort? And if so, is that your mission or does that belong to somebody else? And I guess the last part is how is that going?

[REDACTED] [REDACTED] It was actually – it all started on Dave's (Petraeus) watch, actually. The concept has kind of matured and in fact, in my other hat, which is the NATO commander in Iraq, that's really in terms of officer education, that's their niche.

But, yeah, we've graduated our first class from the Iraqi military academy at Rustamiyah 78 new second lieutenants, none of whom had previous military experience. And that's significant, because you know we've also brought in, as you know, former officers to fill the ranks, and this was the first class – it graduated in January, that is young men who never had any previous military experience. So that's the beginning, it seems to me, of an officer development system, officer education system that will over time, you know, essentially replenish the ranks from start to finish.

And we're going to – we actually, it's another one of these national unity initiatives. There's three military academies in Iraq. One in Zakho, one in Qualachulon (?), they're both in Kurdistan, and one at Rustamiyah. And we've got them linked together with a common curriculum, a common program of instruction, common course length, they share instructors. And now they are each producing about 100 every nine months. Where we want to get them is to each produce about 300 because our analysis of the life-cycle needs of the army is that they'll need about 900 new lieutenants every year.

But that's all in place. There's a joint staff college equivalent to our Command and General Staff College in place. It will graduate 50 junior level they call it – that'd be majors and lieutenant colonels and then this year, this is the pilot year, 37 of the seniors, which are essentially full colonels and civilians, by the way, and that course will double in size next year as well.

There's a war college – actually they are going to call it a national defense university, that will open in September. And by the way, that's not unique on the army side. On the police side we've recently converted Baghdad police college to the production of officers, and they've got a nine-

month course – I'm sorry, they've got a six-month, a one-year course, and they've got a three-year course. And all those are up and running and if you all come over here and want to visit them -- I think that this is what will essentially create this enterprise that will endure over time.

Q: I am trying to get over there specifically just to bother you for a couple days so I can come back and report all that. I really think the larger message needs to be made. It's not just about producing battalions or producing soldiers and policemen, but it's also about producing infrastructure, and I think that's a story that the American people need to hear.

█ Absolutely right. And, just to highlight – or reinforce that point, it's really what we focus on now. I mean the generation of units is really (in train?) and requires very little – and by the way, handed over in great measure. The platform instructors for all of these institutes, academies, training centers, used to be exclusively Coalition and now it's 70 percent Iraqi. And by the end of this year, we will have transitioned most instructor positions over to Iraqis and then we'll be in a mentoring and advising role there.

We've also sent 500 mid-grade officers out of country as part of a NATO initiative to, you know, to the Marshall Center. And we had a kid graduate from Sandhurst who graduated with an award for the best foreign cadet. So, I mean, that's the institution side of it. It's not sexy, but it's the most important thing we're doing.

Q: And a story that needs to be told.

Q: Hey, sir, Ken Allard. Actually I think we adopted the class at Rustamiyah on our last trip over there ourselves. And we sure remember them very fondly.

█ Yeah, that's right, I do.

Q: The thing that I am getting a lot of questions about from our correspondents -- by the way, they talk about the present level of violence is making it even tougher on them to cover the story than it otherwise would have been.

One of the things that is interesting to me, based on my own experience in Bosnia, is whether or not you are seeing any signs of what amounts to a de facto ethnic cleansing? Because what happened over there was not so much that you had the death squads moving around, they were certainly present, probably in the same way that they are in Iraq, but what was happening is that a lot of what was going on was simply people getting out of harm's way. Are you seeing any signs that that is going on, and if so, what are the institutions you're building doing about that?

█ Yeah, one of the – well, a couple of ways to answer that, or a couple of aspects to the answer. And that is most of the problems, this is no surprise, it's a flash to the obvious, you know, it's where the fault lines exist. And the principal fault line exists in Baghdad, pure and simple. It's also the center of gravity politically and so forth.

So we haven't seen the kind of problems that you are talking about any place else than Iraq with the exception of Baghdad. One of General Casey's CCIR (commanders' critical information requirements) is displacement of civilians, for exactly the reason you talk about. Are they being forced out, are they leaving?

By the way, the analysis of that is very complicated right now because we are right in the middle of Arba'een. Ashura is, you know, their Good Friday essentially, and then 40 days later is the Arba'een holiday and they – and many of them troop south, many of the Shi'a pilgrims, I should be more specific – troop south. And that's going on at precisely the time we are trying to figure out, you know, what's truth and what's fiction about the movement of people.

There have been two – since the Samarra mosque incident – there's been two reports of families on the move. One was I think – and again this is all on background, so please don't use the exact number – one involved 200 families and another one about the same number moving from Baghdad south. And the first report was absolutely determined to be pilgrims. The second one we don't have the answer yet; it could very well be that there were people that had moved out of southeast Baghdad to the south, to get away from what they perceived to be an unsecure situation.

As to what we're doing about it, this is really an operational answer to that question, but we are really focused like a laser beam on Baghdad, because again, for all the reasons I mentioned. And General Casey as you know has brought up the – a piece of his operational reserve to thicken the ranks. It's also been, by the way, a pretty good test of their ability to move and determine what timelines they would need to have to move.

We've brought three battalions of public order back from – they were forward deployed elsewhere, we brought them back into Baghdad. The Iraqi army has moved another couple battalions into Baghdad.

So we've probably increased the force levels in Baghdad by about anywhere from 3,500 to 4,000. Increased a number of patrols by between 150 and 200 a day. Kind of the issue now is restoring public confidence, frankly, and that takes place by increased presence. And so all that's happening. And we're monitoring the kind of things you just talked about as part of our CCIR.

But to this point, we haven't seen those kind of displacements. What we have seen is kind of a bit of a back and forth, you know, there will be a Sunni atrocity and then there will be a Shi'a atrocity and a Sunni atrocity. So the real trick here is to break the cycle, and we are working on that.

Q: General, Bob Maginnis. Question regarding the defense ministry and the interior ministry and whether or not you are seeing indications that they are maturing enough to be able to oversee countrywide the types of functions that you just described.

Yeah, maturing -- the present participle applies. They are clearly, they are clearly maturing. And we monitor – just like the tactical units have a – we call it a transitional readiness assessment. It's a monthly report card, if you will. We've got one that we, that we - where we evaluate ourselves, because we are not advisors over there, we're partners with them. And so on a monthly basis we determine what progress we have made or have failed to make on 18 key functions in any ministry, and it's everything from personal management with, you know, subtext of pay and promotion and retirement, all the way down to the inspector general function.

And we have - you know that I've got developmental responsibility for both ministries. And I've got right now about 70 soldiers and civilians in each ministry, and that number is going to go up a bit here in the next month because we have made some analysis of additional needs. And we really want them to get off to a promising start in this first 100 days of the new government. We are really focused on having them achieve some successes in the first 100 days or so in the new government. And so we're really, we've got some programs we've worked out with them to give them a few early wins if you want to call it that.

So, now there are some processes though where we have made enormous strides, pay for example. Promotion we're close, very close. And some that are just going to take longer. And the two that come immediately to mind are procurement and contracting. You know, they come from a command-directed economy where pretty much if you needed it you asked for the money, if you got it, you spent it. There was no competitive bidding and no competing in the free market economy against other sectors of the economy.

But they are very much in a free market economy now. They have to make their case to a council, and they've to do competitive bidding. This is their law, by the way, not ours – their new

law I should say. So that's been a real eye opener for them, and that probably is going to take, you know, a couple of years, I think, to mature.

Q: General, just one follow-up. The pay you mentioned, you know, what have you done to fix that?

Great question. Well, first of all, we've identified the problem. The problem wasn't pay; it was easy to lump it in to the category of pay. The problem was really personal accountability, frankly. So, for example, if a commander up in Mosul didn't have proper accountability of his people and either numbers or in rank structure and he placed a demand on the system – and it's still a manual system – and here came the payroll (north?) and he got there and he didn't have enough money to pay, then it was sort of lumped in in precisely as a pay problem. Well, it wasn't a pay problem, it was a personal accountability problem. So that's where we put our effort.

And we've got a couple of initiatives in place to build for them what we might call a little personnel administration center in each battalion where as these soldiers go on leave, you know, they're basically on a 21-day on, seven-day off cycle, they process in and out each time. And it's beginning to give us a heck of a lot more clarity on what's out there. And as a result, I would venture to say – now this, our last month may have been an anomaly, I hope not, but the last month we had fewer than 1,000 pay problems in an army of, you know, that's just now at about at 106,000. And those were corrected very quickly upon identification.

The police is a little different. You know, they draw their pay and their support for local police from the provinces and then the national police are supported from the center. So, you know, we're learning as we go with that, but we've made some pretty significant strides with that as well.

Q: General, this is Jeff McCausland again. On the (inaudible) side, there's been a lot of focus frankly on the actual ministers, a Mr. (inaudible – sounds like he might mean Bayan Jaber, interior minister) the minister of interior is one that (inaudible – is talked about?) an awful lot. I'll fully understand if you don't want to want to comment at all. But I am curious about your thoughts at all, because obviously the guys at the top are going to be key and essential on answering a lot of these questions, whether it's infiltration, whether it's pay, (inaudible) et cetera.

You know ministers – in general terms – I don't want to comment about them personally because, you know, I mean, I have such a close relationship to them it wouldn't take too long to figure out where it came from.

But I will tell you in general terms, what this country needs in my view is ministers who - you know, we tend to say we need a government of national unity, and that's a fact. No doubt about it. But you do need ministers in the key positions who have a strong political backing. In other words, they've got to have a constituency so that as they are buffeted by other influencers they've got some political backing. I mean, this is a democracy now.

(break in transcript)

Q: Sir, Ken Allard again. I was really impressed with some of the (inaudible – sounds like BUDS) that we saw, particularly with the overlapping surveillance systems. Have those things been any real assistance to you guys in dealing with the problem of the civil violence? Have those systems helped you guys at all react?

Yeah, I think so. Frankly, Pete Chiarelli would be better positioned to answer that because he really has access to that all the time. But I do know that --

Q: Well tell him that I said hi and also that --

I will.

Q: And I'll ask him those embarrassing questions myself.

Yeah, yeah. No problem. But I will say that he has reported that some of those things have allowed – you know the whole issue in this part of the world, I am not just talking about Baghdad or Iraq, but this part of the world is rumor generally trumps fact. And what these overlapping systems have allowed us to do in many cases is confirm or deny and tamp down things that otherwise could really spin out of control.

Lawrence: Any additional questions for the general?

Q: Well, thanks for what you've done, buddy. This is Bob Scales. You know, you've done a terrific job and all of us over here are really proud of you.

Well, thanks. That means a lot. And by the way though, it hasn't escaped me. I know you're trying to get over here, but I notice you didn't try to get over here before St. Patrick's Day (laughter).

Q: Hey, I am on a (six - inaudible) train tomorrow morning; I am going to O'Houlihan's on 57<sup>th</sup> Street, and I'll drink a beer (inaudible) I am going to march in the parade, (laughter).

Are you really? That's great.

Q: Take care, my friend.

All right, you all take care.

Q: Take care, sir.

Q: Thanks to you, general.

Q: Hey Dallas?

Lawrence: Yes, sir. Folks, just a quick reminder that was on background. Go ahead, colonel.

(sidebar conversation continues).

End of transcript