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Presenter: Lt. Gen. Martin Dempsey, commander, Multinational Security Transition Command in Iraq (MNSTC-I)

Friday, December 2, 2005

News Briefing with Lt. Gen. Martin Dempsey

BRYAN WHITMAN (Pentagon spokesman): Well, good morning to all of you. And General Dempsey, this is Bryan Whitman at the Pentagon. Can you hear me?

GEN. DEMPSEY: I can hear you.

MR. WHITMAN: Well, thank you, General, for being with us today. And welcome to the press corps here.

I think all of you know our briefer today is Lieutenant General Martin Dempsey. He is the commander of the Multinational Security Transition Command in Iraq, and as such, he and his organization are responsible for assisting the Iraqi government in the development, organization, training, equipping, sustaining the Iraqi security forces. As you all know, or if you don't, General Dempsey assumed command on 8 September of this past year, but he previously commanded the 1st Armored Division in Baghdad for 14 months during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

And he is prepared to tell you a little bit about what he's up to and what the command is doing, and then going to take some questions.

Thank you again, General Dempsey, and I'll turn it over to you.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Thanks very much.

Well, as mentioned, I command the Multinational Security Transition Command here in Iraq, which is more commonly known as MNSTC-I. Permit me to make a brief opening statement, and then I'll be glad to take your questions.

MNSTC-I is responsible for the development of the Iraqi security forces. There's both a quantitative and a qualitative component to this task, and we address both. There's also both a local tactical level and a national institutional element to this task, and we address both of those as well.

Stated another way, we're responsible for the development of Iraqi security forces, military and police, from soldier to minister of Defense, and from policeman to minister of Interior. We assist Iraq, build units,

develop leaders and establish systems. We approach this task along three primary lines of operation.

First, the initial training of individuals, the formation and initial training of battalions, the fielding of their equipment, and the construction of the facilities in which they live, train and maintain. In this effort, we are closely linked with Lieutenant General J.R. Vines and his multinational corps here in Iraq, who provide the embedded trainers and transition teams, who then establish partner relationships with Iraqi units as they become operational and enter the fight.

Second, the development of institutional systems such as pay, promotion, logistics, medical, communications, budgeting, contracting and other national institutional systems necessary to support forces in the field.

And third, the professionalization of these military and police forces, so that they become institutions that will endure and that will contribute to national cohesion through emphasis on human rights, diversity and the rule of law.

Those are the major muscle movements. And so the question is, how are we doing? Well, while we are here discussing them, 100 battalions of Iraqi army soldiers are conducting security operations throughout the country; another 27 battalions of special police are distributed around the country, providing a bridge between combat operations and civil police operations. The Iraqi navy is guarding its coastline and protecting the offshore oil platforms. The Iraqi air force is moving supplies throughout the country, including some of the materials necessary for the upcoming elections. Iraqi border police are manning 170 border forts and 22 ports of entry; 75,000 Iraqi policemen are patrolling Iraq cities, and another 7,300 Iraqi policemen are in training. Two thousand seven hundred Iraqi soldiers are in training. Five hundred army officer cadets and 286 police officer cadets are in training. It's important to note that the majority of the instructors conducting this training are Iraqi instructors.

Today, when an Iraqi soldier or a policeman joins the service, he or she pledges an oath to Iraq and to its constitution.

In the elections of January 2005, approximately 130,000 Iraqi security forces secured the polling sites. When the elections of December 2005 occur in just a few weeks, 225,000 Iraqi security forces will secure the polling sites.

When I was here a little more than a year ago, we were looking to put an Iraqi face on security problems. Today, neither we nor our Iraqi counterparts talk about putting an Iraqi face on security problems; we talk about finding an Iraqi solution.

Of course, while we are here discussing these Iraqi security forces, and while those hundreds of thousands of Iraqi soldiers and policemen are out on patrol, and while the future leaders of a free Iraq are being groomed in the classroom, there are obviously other forces working hard to pull Iraq apart. We're working harder.

At the beginning of this statement, I said that we must address both the quantity and the quality of the Iraqi security forces. That's because in the clash of arms, physical courage and superior training carry the day. But in the clash of ideas, moral courage and perseverance determine the outcome. This war requires extraordinary amounts of each of these. We understand that, and so, increasingly, do our Iraqi counterparts.

At this point, I'd be happy to take your questions.

MR. WHITMAN: Well, thank you for that overview, General Dempsey, and we'll get right into it here.

Mr. Aldinger.

Q General, Charlie Aldinger with Reuters. How much are you spending in the current year -- or how much is the United States spending in the current year on training Iraqi security forces, training and equipping? And maybe you could break that down. And there are reports that you would like to increase that or plan to increase that by as much 3.9 billion (dollars) in the coming year. Could you comment on that or any increase you might be considering?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, let me answer the question this way: we have the Iraqi security forces fund, which runs through 30 September of calendar year '06, budgeted in the course of a two-year spend plan about -- just over \$10 billion. And we're -- we have a spend plan to purchase the training and equipping, infrastructure development that we need in '06 to build that out. We have just begun the process of identifying how far along in our plan that will take us. It was never the case that this force that we felt we need to build for them, to account for their own internal security, would be completed with that \$10.6 billion. And so the issue became at what point they began to contribute to their own security.

And so we've been working very closely with them in their budget. It's one of the institutional development systems that I mentioned earlier. They are coming to grips with the fact that they're now part of a -- they're out of a command-directed economy and very much into a free-market economy where defense competes with other things in terms of governmental priorities.

So we don't have back yet exactly what they will have in their security budget. We think we know. But that budget hasn't been approved yet by the Transitional National Assembly. When it is, then we'll compare what they have and what we have remaining in the Iraqi security forces' funds, and we'll have a better idea of what a potential supplemental would be. And then, based on all that, we'll come up with a prioritization list.

Most important, walking our Iraqi counterparts through this process with us, so that they begin to take ownership in a financial way for their security and for the -- for restoring their own security forces in the country.

Q General, just a brief follow up. I believe you said you have -- the United States has \$10 billion budgeted over a two-year period for training and equipping the Iraqis. Is that in the current calendar year and the upcoming calendar year the \$10 billion? And how much of that have you spent so far? How much remains?

GEN. DEMPSEY: (Off mike) The supplementals came to us is that they -- the supplemental comes in a -- it's the fiscal year '05 supplemental, but it's -- the spend plan runs out through 30 September of '06.

To answer your question, I've got about \$3.5 billion that is programmed, but not yet committed to carry me through into the beginning of '06.

MR. WHITMAN: Bob, go ahead.

Q General, this is Bob Burns from AP. I wonder if you would look ahead into the future. And what is the plan for the end state in terms of the size of the Iraqi army, the size of the other elements of the military -- Iraqi military, the Iraqi police? And when do you foresee getting there?

GEN. DEMPSEY: We've got a force that we've agreed upon with the current sitting government. And of course, when the new government comes in, we'll have some opportunities there to discuss that with them, as well.

Right now we're building a 10-division army. It's a light infantry army with some enablers that will allow it

to have some ability to project force around the country, and at end state, it will number approximately 160,000.

The police -- to talk about the MOI forces, we really have to break it down into the separate components. There are special police, and there's approximately 25,000 of those. They're almost at end state now, and those are commandos and public order battalions. And then there is the what you and I would describe as the station-house police. And based on a ratio of approximately one to 200 by population, that number comes out to about 135,000. And we're right at about 75,000 trained and equipped right now. We train about 3,500 every couple of months at a variety of institutions both inside Iraq and out. Then there's also border police. We need 27,000 border police; we're at 18,000. There's a 6,000-man highway patrol; we have 3,000.

I think the simplest way to answer your question about end state is that that force as I just described it is the agreed-upon force. We call it the objective COIN force, counterinsurgency force, because it has the necessary capabilities broadly to provide internal security. And the army will largely be built out in '06 and the police will be largely built out in the first half of '07.

Q Can I follow up, just a quick follow-up?

MR. WHITMAN: Sure.

Q General, Bob Burns again. On the Air Force. Are you planning to train and develop an Air Force that would include Iraqi attack air crews?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, I'm glad you brought that up because it allows me to mention that what we've got is we've got essentially three phases here in terms of Iraq's national security. We've got this objective counterinsurgency force, which is largely, as you might expect, a ground-centric force, and yet we also have a five-year plan inside of a 10-year vision. And we're working with our Iraqi counterparts to determine what force they will over time require to account for their external security as well.

And in doing so, we realize that they will -- as we discuss this with them, they're going to have to make some decisions, as any nation does, about what size ground force can they afford in order to modernize what they have and also to put money into other than ground forces. So, stated another way, they have 10 divisions out through '06, '07, but they may not end up with 10 divisions in the future as they decide how to account for the budget share from their economy and apply it to modernization and to the addition of things like aircraft.

MR. WHITMAN: Let's go to Jim and then over to Tom.

Q General, you -- Jim Miklaszewski, NBC.

You've recently been handed the mission of developing the Ministry of Interior, which oversees the police forces. So I'd like to ask you about the quality of the police forces. There's increasing evidence that many of these local police forces have been infiltrated, if not taken over, by militias. We still get occasional reports of many of these local police forces not being paid at any given time, and instances of corruption. Just how serious a problem is that, and how do you get a handle on that to rid these police forces of these militias and corruption and in some cases inefficiencies?

GEN. DEMPSEY: (Chuckles.) That may have been one question, Jim, but it's a Ph.D. -- it's going to require a Ph.D.-level answer, but let me give it a shot.

Yeah, we took over the -- we've had police for some time. And to get at the quality issue, I can tell you that a significant portion of their training in the classroom and also in vignettes and practical exercises is on

policing, protecting and serving in a democratic system, human rights, rule of law. And then we partner with them -- I've got international police liaison officers spread throughout the country who partner with police forces, and they do a couple of things. Most important, probably, in answer to your question, is they role-model and they coach, teach and mentor on proper conduct in a democratic society.

The special police forces -- we actually have transition teams, just as the army units do -- we call those special police transition teams. And again, their role is to oversee, mentor, coach, cajole and do whatever they've got to to bring this thing along in a way that makes it a contributor to the national cohesion and not to national divisiveness.

Now, the question about militias is really a separate but certainly related question. Police forces, contrary to army forces, are locally recruited and tend to be -- and tend to live and work locally. So what you find is that police forces naturally tend to be of single ethnic groups and are conflicted. And I think that what you hear in places, in the southeast in particular, but not just in the southeast, is some of those conflicting loyalties at work.

As you know, the -- or maybe you don't know, but in '06 we've determined that we will make police forces in general a point of emphasis. We're calling 2006 the year of the police internal to MNSTC-I. And we're going to try to get additional partnership teams out there to work with these police in order to kind of address some of the concerns you're hearing about.

Corruption is another matter. There is a -- they are taking an honest shot at corruption. And our intervention into these ministries in significant numbers I think is helping in that regard. But, you know, there is -- I guess I would describe it as some bad habits that have to be overcome here. And it's why when I talk to people about progress I always make -- I'm very careful to note the fact that progress at the local tactical level is ahead of, significantly, progress at the national institutional level, for all the reasons you mentioned. And we're working it.

Q And a quick follow-up. But, General, how critical are the police to countering the insurgency in Iraq, and just how serious is this problem with these militias?

GEN. DEMPSEY: The special police, in particular, provide a vital function in countering the insurgents and terrorist and foreign fighter threat because they are a bridge for us. You heard me mention, if we have a problem in a particular city, we generally use the military -- or the Iraqis generally use the military to restore stability. And then these commandos come in, because they've got some policing skills, some civil security skills, but they've also got some top-end combat skills, and that's our bridge while we retrain, if necessary, or recruit and then train some of the police that may have been overwhelmed by these insurgents. So the special police, in particular, have a definite role in the counterinsurgency.

You know, the local police -- it's really our goal -- our long-range goal here is to restore civil security. And so we've armed the police different than we might have armed police in another environment. I mean, they typically have access to AK-47s, for example, and body armor and helmets and things that you wouldn't expect a normal police force elsewhere to look like. But we've got to walk away from that, and we've got to get to the point where the police are truly an element of local civil control, as opposed to counterinsurgent forces. And all that is being worked as part of this 2006 year of the police that I mentioned.

Now, as for militias, Article 117 of their constitution, the constitution that the Iraqis just passed, first of all, it forbids any other armed force outside of the legitimate security forces of the -- at the national level, which is to say it outlaws militias. It also accounts for the possibility of regions having home guards or regional guards. Frankly, the Iraqi government has to figure out what they mean by that. And I think you'll find this new government to take that on.

When you ask how serious is it, the seriousness of it is more or less in that it undermines the Iraqi security forces that we're training and equipping as the sole provider, the legitimate source of authority and force in Iraq. And so it is serious problem, and one which, you know, we all work on. And now -- as you know, we don't tolerate the presence of militias when we encounter it.

And secondly, we do on the other hand encourage individuals who might have been part of a militia to come into service as individuals not as units, and that has actually worked out okay. I mean, in even in my first tour here, I had the occasion to do some of that. And if they come in, and if they pledge this oath, and if they then demonstrate that they will live up to it, typically it turns out okay. But yeah, we've got some work to do in that regard.

MR. WHITMAN: Go ahead, Tom.

Q General, Tom Bowman with the Baltimore Sun. General Abizaid said in the spring that the Iraqi forces could take the lead by the end of 2005, and then he later amended it to say that maybe the spring or summer of 2006 they could take the lead. And now, this week with the National Strategy for Victory in Iraq that was released, it talks here about in the short term, you'll be standing up security forces, and then in the medium term, you'll be, quote, "in the lead, defeating terrorists." How do you define the medium term? How many years off would that be?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, I'm not really exactly familiar with how we translate calendar years into short and midterm. I can tell you what my part of it is, and that is to build the force that then goes into the field and begins to perform, but there's a performance aspect as well. It's not just sticking it out there. It's got to actually be able to perform. And so there's a much more holistic answer to that question.

However, the -- I think I'd also like to mention that Iraqi security forces are in the lead right now. You know the numbers because I think you've probably seen previous briefings. But you know, 40 of them are in the lead right now and 33 own their own battlespace and a hundred of them are out there in the fight -- and I'm talking about just the army and, of course, the police as well. And so the term "in the lead" is -- if it implies that they're not going to be doing anything in the interim between now and the midterm is just not a fair characterization of what's going on over here.

Q Sir, this is the National Strategy for Victory in Iraq that the president released this week. Have you seen it? It says medium term, Iraqi forces are in the lead. I'm just asking you to define that.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah, sure. I did see it. I got it yesterday when it was released, and I have not yet made sure that I completely understand the time horizons. But I'm sure that the definitions in there are consistent with the definitions we've been using over here. What you're asking me for is dates, and I'm not prepared to give you those.

MR. WHITMAN: Let's move on to Pam.

Q Sir, this is Pam Hess with UPI.

With regard to the Iraqi -- the Interior Ministry jail that General Horst came upon, are you guys doing anything in general to take a survey of where other such facilities might be and check out conditions there? And could you elaborate for us on what's been happening with that since then?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yes, I can. And when you say "you guys," I mean, this is not my particular part of the operation. But I have been in meetings, and so I can share with you what we're doing. I mean, clearly, we're

taking that very seriously.

There's kind of two separate tracks. There's the Iraqi-led investigation into the bunker in particular, and that investigation is ongoing. And then there is the issue of trying to determine if there are other facilities like this out there. And that analysis of intelligence reports, really -- it's looking back through all intelligence reports to see where there have been reports that may have indicated the existence of similar facilities. And then that list is being put together, and then there will be an inspection team, including -- this one is led by us, but with Iraqis. And they will go out and inspect those facilities to see -- on an unannounced basis, I should mention -- to see if in fact there's any substance to the reports.

So yeah, both tracks are working.

Q Any idea when that process might begin, the inspection process, or how long the intel part will take?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah, I don't know the answer to that, Pam, honestly, because I don't know how long the list is. I think it'll -- that's really what -- it'll be determined.

And it's going to focus initially in and around Baghdad, of course, but I also think it'll take a look more broadly than that.

Q Sorry. What is the unit that's -- what's the entity that's in charge of this? You said it's not your bailiwick, really. What's the U.S. entity that is?

GEN. DEMPSEY: The multinational force level. You know, General Casey's staff is working, I think, with the C2 to develop the list in particular.

Q General, it's Gordon Lubold at Army Times. As I understand it, one of the challenges to getting Iraqi security forces to operate independently is the logistics piece. And I wonder if you talk a little bit to what you're doing there to train those folks and where the shortages lie.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah, that's a good question. There's really -- the three things that have been, I suppose, most notable in letting these units advance toward independence or self-reliance have been logistics, communications, and the production of junior officers. If you'd like, I can talk to all three of those, but I'll answer your question about logistics in particular.

This army we're building is largely a fixed army, and so it has a structure that goes from a national depot, which exists in Taji, just north of Baghdad, and then there are five regional support units that each have two divisions that draw supplies off of them. All five of those regional support units are built and in various stages of preparation to become self-reliant. And then the link from there down to the tactical unit is provided by a motor transport regiment, several hundred trucks that push supplies down to headquarters and support companies at the battalion level.

And by April, all of the HSCs -- the headquarters and support companies -- will be built out. And so you'll have -- the thing remaining to be built are these motor transport regiments, which, you know, we need 10 of them and there are several hundred trucks in each. We'll have most of the equipment on hand in the next six months, and then it's a matter of training the logisticians.

We just trained -- we have the Iraqi Army Service Support Institute up in Taji, north of Baghdad again. We just graduated our 1,000th Iraqi soldier out of that institute. And so we've got a build plan that goes out through '06 to put this logistics structure in place, and we're focusing the effort on those units -- those Iraqi divisions that are closest to being prepared to transition.

So it's all nested together, the production and the transition campaign plan.

MR. WHITMAN: Mike.

Q General, it's Mike Mount with CNN. I'm sure you've heard some of the reports in the last few days about the U.S. military working with an organization to place articles -- paying to have articles placed into Iraqi newspapers. Has there been anybody with your organization or anybody working with your organization to place articles in papers around Iraq promoting what you-all are doing at MNSTC-I?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah. No, we don't have -- I don't even have an information operation staff officer. We don't do information operations, and the Iraqis are not nearly ready to do information operations systematically. But, you know, I think it's safe to say that this is all being reviewed, and I suspect that there will be a statement put out. Nobody's more introspective and self-analyzing than us, and I'm sure there will be a statement made here sometime soon.

Q Can I follow that up?

MR. WHITMAN: No, we've reached the end of our time. And so we'll allow the general to have any closing comments that he might want to make and we'll leave it at that.

General, back to you.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, I appreciate that. I hadn't prepared any particular comments.

I would like to say that, you know, behind all this -- we talk about the systemic level and this and that as -- but we've got some pretty brave young men and women out there that are living and working and coaching these Iraqis along, and I'd like to always ask you to remember that; that at the business end of this thing is a bunch of hard-working young men and women of America who are trying their best to get this thing right.

And then the other thing I'll say is it's the holiday season. I'll wish you all happy holidays and Merry Christmas. And also tell you that as far as we're concerned over here, we think we're probably doing a pretty good job of bringing peace on Earth and goodwill to men, and particularly this mission we're doing to hand over security to the Iraqi forces.

And then lastly, if there's anybody from the United States Navy in the room, I'd like to say beat Navy.

Take care of yourself. (Laughter.)

MR. WHITMAN: Well, General, thanks for spending some time with us this morning, and we hope to have you back in a few more weeks to give us another update.

Thank you.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Thank you, Bryan.

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