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**Presenter: Former Commander, Multi-National Transition Command Iraq and NATO Training Mission Iraq, Lt. Gen. David Petraeus, USA**      **October 05, 2005 1:35 PM EDT**

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**News Briefing with Lt. Gen. David Petraeus**

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Moderator; Bryan Whitman (deputy assistant secretary of Defense for Public Affairs)

MR. WHITMAN: Welcome this afternoon, and as I indicated to you earlier today, we kind of have a rare opportunity here to have a man that I think all of you know, Lieutenant General David Petraeus, who has spent the better half of the last two and a half years in Iraq, and most recently for the last 12 months as the Multi-National Security Transition Command in Iraq, the commander of that, which, of course, is responsible for training and equipping the Iraqi security forces there. He is on his way to his new assignment at the Combined Arms Center out at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and in the midst of his packing agreed to come in and spend some time with you today. And for that we are very appreciative.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Thanks.

Actually, that is why I'm here. I was given the alternative yesterday afternoon, I could either help with the packing or face the Pentagon press corps. It was a pretty tough decision, and I think that I made the right one, but I'll let you know at the end of this session.

Well, as was mentioned, I have been in Iraq the better part of the past two and a half years, leaving most recently on 8 September after handing off command of the Multi-National Security Transition Command Iraq, which I commanded for 15 months. In fact, we stood it up back in early June of last year, and also, the NATO Training Mission Iraq to Lieutenant General Marty Dempsey, who is admirably equipped to take that forward.

The bottom line up front that I'd like to leave with you today is that there has been enormous progress with the Iraqi security forces over the course of the past 16 months in the face of a brutal insurgency, and there is considerable work still to be done. Iraqi security force readiness has continued to grow with each passing week. You can take a percentage off every metric that's out there, whatever you want -- training, equipping, infrastructure reconstruction, units in the fight; schools, academies reestablished -- you name it -- and what has been accomplished since the transition to sovereignty late last June would still be remarkable.

There are now over 197,000 trained and equipped Iraqi security forces. As folks have noted over the past week, that should be close to 200,000 by the referendum in the middle part of this month. There are over 115

police and army combat battalions in the fight. Most -- about 80 -- are assessed as fighting alongside our forces. That is level three, by the way, in this discussion of levels of readiness. Over 36 are assessed as being "in the lead" -- that's the term for level two -- including the one that is assessed as needing no coalition assistance whatsoever; i.e., fully independent. That does not mean, by the way, just fully independent operations, it means it doesn't need anything from the coalition. And again, it is not surprising that there are very, very few of those. Of those 36, a substantial number -- some seven just in Baghdad alone -- have their own areas of operation and, of course, that obviously includes a large number of level two units.

Some examples. More than 10 Iraqi battalions of the 3rd Iraqi Division, the Border Force and the Police Commando Division were operating in western Nineveh province during the fighting in and around Tall Afar. Sixteen Iraqi battalions from several different divisions -- police and army -- are now fighting in Anbar province with our forces. Now, the bulk of those are in eastern Anbar province in the Fallujah/Ramadi area, but a number are also now out in the western in those three operations that are being conducted out there. Some of these are level two. There are actually some that are level three. An Iraqi Police Mechanized Battalion -- level three, by the way -- now helps coalition forces secure the Airport Road. Three Iraqi battalions, all level two -- one, by the way, is a former level one that was just reassessed as part of the process -- those three secure Haifa Street, which was known as "Purple Heart Boulevard." And Iraqi security forces, as I'm sure you all know, now control the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala and a number of other locations.

To be sure, few of these units are candidates for the 1st Marine Division or the 101st Airborne right now. However, they have come a very long way in a relatively short period of time in the face of a brutal enemy who has tried everything to disrupt and derail the reestablishment of Iraqi security forces, reconstruction of their infrastructure, and the delivery of their equipment. And despite taking casualties that are at least twice those of U. S. forces, Iraqis continue to volunteer in droves for the Iraqi security forces.

Again, it is not surprising that very, very few Iraqi battalions are assessed at level one, which means, again, fully independent, not just capable of fully independent operations, because many level two units operate independently, such as those that I mentioned, the seven in Baghdad alone that have their own areas of operation and in which, therefore, U.S. forces or coalition forces, other than their transition teams and perhaps some other small elements, are not required. So again, fully independent, requiring no coalition assistance in any form.

Given the need for further development of Iraqi logistical elements, ministry capacity and capability, intelligence structures and command and control, all of which we've been working on with our Iraqi counterparts, it will understandably take quite some time before substantial numbers of units are assessed as being fully independent -- i.e., level one -- and requiring no assistance.

But again, units at level two can control their own areas of responsibility and therefore allow coalition units to focus elsewhere or eventually to go home. And even units at level three, the fighting-alongside category, are very, very important and are very helpful in thickening the capabilities of coalition forces, adding native language capability, appreciation of the culture, and so forth. And many of them, for example, man checkpoints and a variety of other less-demanding, although still dangerous, tasks.

Now, development of the institutions has gone on very well over the course of the time I've been talking about. The military academy has over 500 cadets. The staff college has just reopened on 25 September, junior and senior, with Iraqi instructors. And that is a NATO effort, by the way, to get that up and going, and they are now going.

Basic training units are training Iraqi soldiers. Branch schools exist now and are training a whole variety of different specialty MOSs, as we would call them in the U.S. Army, different skills, everything from medical skills, logistics, maintenance, supply, engineers, armor, infantry and so forth. There are basic police academies that now have a capacity of well over 7,000; advanced police training of hundreds every week is ongoing. And all

of that, again, has made great strides.

Repair of infrastructure has also seen enormous progress, with hundreds of police stations; over a hundred border forts; dozens of army bases, at least four of which are the size of the Fort Drum cantonment area, actually house -- could house an entire division; the Ministry of Defense building itself; again, military and police academies and training facilities, forward operating bases and so on. Again, all enormous progress in that area. And the delivery of equipment has been very, very substantial as well with nearly 220,000 sets of body armor, over 30,000 radios, over 186,000 AK-47s, 166,000 pistols, over 330 million rounds of ammunition, much of which is actually stored, and nearly 20,000 vehicles delivered since the first of July last year.

There is certainly a need to provide additional assistance in a variety of areas. One area in which there's considerable effort right now is to provide -- to augment the two existing mechanized brigades: one that is in the Army Mechanized Division and will soon be joined by another that is in training and then the one in the Iraqi police unit, which in fact, by the way, is receiving U.S.-made armored security vehicles, the same ones that our MPs use; and then the additional wheeled, armored personnel carriers that will be purchased, enough for three separate brigades over the course of the months ahead.

Now, there are other factors than just development of the forces themselves that will be essential in enabling Iraqi forces to succeed, including development of a political environment that -- as in much of the South and in the Kurdish areas -- results in support for Iraqi forces and denies the insurgents sanctuary and assistance. A reduction in unemployment will help, as that would reduce the number of potential Iraqi guns for hire. Assistance from neighboring countries in restricting -- reducing the flow of foreign fighters and suicide bombers would help enormously. And improvements in the government's provision of basic services will of course create greater support for the government and undermine the efforts of the insurgents to discredit it.

The key to much of what lies ahead in fact will be Iraqi leaders at the national and provincial levels as well as in the ministries and the security forces themselves. And the developments over the next several months will be critical -- as General Casey and General Abizaid and the secretary made very clear over the course of last week -- as the constitutional referendum in the mid part of this month, the general elections in mid-December and then the subsequent formation of a new government all take place. That will be the fourth government, by the way, in about 18 months, and there will be attendant challenges with that.

So to conclude, as a bottom, bottom line, Iraqi security force capability, numbers and readiness have been moving steadily upward over the course of the past 15 or 16 months. The Iraqis are in this fight. They are fighting and dying for their country, and they are fighting increasingly well.

And now, I'd be happy to take your questions starting right here.

Q General, given the -- you have listed some caveats such as political progress and stopping of infiltrators. Given the fairly bright picture of progress you've just painted, would you venture to predict that U.S. troops could begin leaving Iraq in fairly significant numbers by the end of next year?

GEN. PETRAEUS: I never thought anyone would ask that question! (Laughter.)

Let me say, really, you know, again, this is going to be very conditions-based. And I think, again, these events that I talked about -- and it's really three events: the referendum, the elections, and the formation of the government -- all will be very, very important in forming or contributing to an environment in which, with adequate security forces at proper readiness levels, and with assistance in those other areas I talked about, particularly from neighboring countries in restricting the flow of foreign fighters and terrorists, that would make such reductions possible. Obviously, that's the goal. That's what everyone is pointing to. But again, very, very conditions-based. And I think that that was laid out pretty well last week.

Q I understand. Everybody's saying conditions-based. Would you venture a prediction -- you know the situation very well -- do you think that enough political progress will be made; do you think, given the improvement in the training, that that significant number of U.S. troops could begin to leave Iraq by the end of next year?

GEN. PETRAEUS: I wouldn't venture that. And I will tell you that I'm a qualified optimist, and that the qualification is that, again, Iraqi leaders very much doing what they want to do and what they need to do over the course of the next few months to keep the country together, to reach out to those that feel they may not have a stake in the success of the new Iraq; to provide competent, honest leadership at the national level, in the provinces, in the ministries; and, of course, to do the same in the security forces. So --

Q Thank you.

Q General, you mentioned --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Good to see you again, by the way.

Q Thank you. Nice to see you.

You mentioned in your opening comments the Iraqis are still volunteering to join the army in large numbers.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yeah.

Q I want to ask you about the problem of vetting and understanding the extent and level of infiltration by either insurgents or sympathizers.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yeah.

Q Do you really have a handle on that problem?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well let me talk -- let me -- that raises a couple of points. The first one is a question that may be out there: What about the Sunni Arabs? Let me tell you that since the Sunni Arab Imams issued a fatwa back in -- I think it was in the March time frame -- that said it's the duty of Iraqi males to join the security forces, they, too, have been volunteering in droves. And in fact, there was a very active effort by the Ministry of Defense in particular, because they have the bulk of the national forces, if you will, those being army units; although the police have battalions as well. Those are also national and therefore should reflect the national composition of the population. But a very active effort to reach out to Sunni Arabs with targeted recruiting, and that was done in Anbar Province, it was done in both western, central and eastern Nineveh Province and throughout that area that -- really, that connects Nineveh with Baghdad, and, of course, in Baghdad itself. And that resulted, in fact, in the enlistment or the recruiting of about 4,000 or so just over the course of a couple of months when that was most active. And the effort is to offset those -- there was a Sunni Arab retention and recruiting problem back in November, probably from about late October to perhaps February or so of last year, and that is, in fact, to offset that. And again, there's been no shortage of volunteers. There is a Sunni Arab, by the way, who is the minister of Defense, and he has worked very hard to facilitate that, although again, the structure of his senior leadership and his division commanders and the officers and so forth is still very reflective of the national composition.

With respect to vetting, about six or a little bit more months ago there was a pretty substantial modification to the vetting process in the Ministry of Interior in particular. That's where the big challenge is, frankly, because let's remember that those forces tend -- are locally recruited, nationally trained, but then returned to the locale from which they came.

By the way, you know, there is Iraqi policy called the Transition Reintegration of Militia that actually reaches out to former Badr Corps, Da'Wa Militia, Communist Party Militia Day we had, and the Baghdad Police Day, the peshmerga, all the other different militias that are out there, to try to bring them in, but to bring them in as individuals and not as units and not allow them to retain composed as such. And, in fact -- but this change now is a pretty rigorous vetting process, and there's also been an effort ongoing called the Qualifying Committee, in fact, to go back and to look at both the qualifications -- broadly written -- of those who are already in the forces. Because let's remember that there was a period back in the fall of 2004 called the 30,000 in 30 Days, I think it was, and there was a substantial intake of people into the police in particular. Many of those are still in there, and their objective is to determine whether they are qualified and the right people to still -- to serve in the --

Q Fall of '04, you said?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Oh, I'm sorry. Fall of '03. Excuse me.

Q Fall of '03.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Excuse me. Fall of '03. Thanks for that.

Yeah.

Q Okay. A couple for you. One, a --

GEN. PETRAEUS: You only get one, I think. But -- go ahead. Yeah.

Q Go over the numbers: 115 battalions right now --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Over 115 police and army. Now, General Casey, I noticed, last week sometime say 80-some-odd. And that is army. But we need to include the police, because remember there are 27 just in the police commandos -- the police commandos are 12, 12 public order, three police mechanized, and there's actually the emergency response unit, which is yet another battalion.

By the way, let me talk about that unit, because that is a very substantial unit, similar to -- in intent to the FBI Hostage Rescue Team, just as the Iraqi counterterrorist unit is similar in intent to the Special Mission Unit of the U.S. Army, except more than twice the size -- very, very highly trained. They absolutely conduct independent operations, but they are still level two units, by the way. And the reason is because their logistics support -- and the biggest contribution we make to an operation of the emergency response unit, by the way, is, we help them get through the checkpoint that enters the area where they -- they're inside a coalition -- a huge coalition compound, and we help them get through the checkpoint, say, "Have a nice operation," and they then don't -- we don't see them again until they report back to the checkpoint and they've already done the operation, dropped off any detainees with the major crimes unit or whoever is taking them, and then come back, operating on Iraqi intelligence, by the way, developed by the Ministry of Interior, with the legal aspects taken care of by Ministry of Interior or Justice and so forth.

So that gives you an example why this level one is such a very, very tough standard and why, again, we should not expect large numbers of level one for quite some time.

Q (Off mike) -- so we're all from the same sheet --

GEN. PETRAEUS: So it's over 115 combat.

Now there are also, just as an example, three motor transport regiments. I mean, that's the beginning of

the effort to develop logistical units. There are a number of base support units that are not in that. There are -- those are logistical units. There are base defense units that are not in there. And they're -- the infrastructure battalions are actually in training.

Q Thirty-six of those --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Of those, over 36 --

Q Over 36 --

GEN. PETRAEUS: -- over 36 are in the lead -- i.e., level two or better -- and you know the number of better was, you know, declassified last week.

And again, you know, people say, "Why are they classified?" Well, I think it was intellectually a sense that we classify our own readiness data. There are people fighting to get this information, if it -- if you get into much more granularity than that. We don't release our own. And so at the very least, it ought to be up to them to release theirs. And I think that's something we're all still working with. So --

Q Realistically, in the next two or three months or four months, how many of the level three battalions would one realistically expect to migrate to level two, just if --

GEN. PETRAEUS: The progression has certainly been about several a month. And again, it -- obviously, it depends on what area they're in, because remember, you know, if you're in a relatively benign area -- if you're in the south, as an example, frankly the progression is much more rapid, because they're not literally fighting for their lives the way they might be in some of the other areas, where they're really under enormous pressure.

Let me just -- yeah?

Q Can you just translate those -- just so we have an idea of the raw numbers -- those battalion numbers into actual troops? I assume all battalions are the same size.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yeah. Battalions are authorized about 750. Again, to be fair, there are different types. But as a general -- the infantry battalions are 750. Mech are slightly different. Actually, most of them run higher than 750. In fact, those that have been in existence for quite some time run substantially higher because so many people want to join their forces, frankly.

Q I'll tell you why I'm asking, because I know it's not a simple math question, we can't simply take the battalions and --

GEN. PETRAEUS: It's not. You can't.

Q So can you give us a rough order of -- when we're talking about these battalions that you talked about, how many troops are we talking about, Iraqi troops, whether they're police or army?

GEN. PETRAEUS: You know what, I'll tell you what, if you can go grab my briefcase -- because this is a real important point, and I'm happy to develop this with you -- if you can grab -- there's a briefing in there I can pull out and I can actually just give you that sense of numbers.

For example, police, it's about -- I think the latest was 68,000 of that 197,000, as an example. And then there's a variety of other categories in there. And I can talk that through you (sic).

Q You can revise those later. But I'd just like to know the numbers that correspond to that breakdown

in level three, two, one that you gave us.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Sure. Oh, well, you'd have to do the math and -- you could do it, though. Just take 80 and multiple it times, say, 800. Because again, they tend to be over strength, actually. We had a problem last fall with the strength of some units. That is generally a thing of the past. So that's not -- Bret?

Q General, there was a lot, obviously, made of General Casey's comments on Capitol Hill that there was just one battalion completely independent --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yep. Yep.

Q -- from three to one. For the guy sitting on the couch at home, if you could in layman's terms explain to him --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yes. Yes.

Q -- why that's not a bad thing.

GEN. PETRAEUS: First of all what I'd say is the focus ought to be a wider aperture than that, and the focus ought to be, at the very least, on level two, and again, above; i.e., level two and level one. It's level two where they can replace our forces, because it's level two where they can assume control of their own area of responsibility.

Beyond that, this is a very young readiness system, if you will. It is one that's literally been in existence only a few months. The transition team leaders and all the rest of them are grappling with this. You know, we don't have AR 30 dash whatever it is in this case that has, you know, 67 pages that tell you how to fill it out. And so there's still some development. In one case I think a higher commander actually asked the transition team leader, "Are you sure that's really a level one?" And the guy said, "Well, maybe it's not, I guess, so put it at level two."

Now, that will even its way out, and that's why I think it's much more important to focus on the aggregate. And what I would say is the slow migration across from level four, which is forming -- i.e., training; then into level three, which is fighting alongside; then to level two, which is in the lead -- and that is the key jump frankly, because again, that's where they can start to take over their own battlespace and allow us to move our forces elsewhere or come home; and then, of course, to level one, where they just don't need anything.

Now, let me caution that at level one there will still be transition teams with those units for the foreseeable future, if for no other reason than just deconfliction of battlespace and to make sure that we don't have fratricide and that type of thing.

Q So just to clarify, if someone was looking at level two, those are the forces we should be looking at to possibly take over battlespace for U.S. forces, enabling them to go home.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yes, that's exactly right. And I think I made that point about four times in there. So -- but I mean, I will underscore that for you again. It is at level two that Iraqi units can take their own battlespace and therefore can allow U.S. forces to move elsewhere or to go home.

Yeah, right back there. Yeah?

Q Sir, can you just address some of the echelons above brigades, the divisions, I guess the brigades themselves? And will changes in those make the units more combat effective or --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yeah. Sure. Again, one of the limiting factors in some cases is command and control above the battalions. And again, that is very much a developing aspect of this, in the sense that there are some brigades -- there's actually a brigade, at least one brigade in Baghdad alone that has, again, its own battlespace. That brigade actually works for General Webster, the 3rd Infantry Division commander.

And that's the way this will progress, by the way, is that that battalions -- we think -- battalions will achieve readiness, they'll get their own battlespace, their brigade headquarters, which are developing -- I mean, we started both at the bottom up and then from the top down, with the idea of meeting in the center, because we had to get on with it and we couldn't do it all top down.

As the brigade becomes ready as a command-and-control headquarters, that it assumes control of some or all of its organic battalions, it then reports to a division -- typically, probably a coalition division; in the meantime, the Iraqi division -- in this case in Baghdad, the 6th Iraqi Division -- it is also developing, it's getting help.

And every one of these battalions, brigade headquarters, division headquarters, ground forces headquarters, joint headquarters have, at the very least, 10-man transition teams -- i.e., adviser teams that are out there, fighting alongside them or with them, typically at the headquarters level, and both helping with additional training, some advice, deconfliction of the battle space, a good command-and-control link, if all else fails, to coalition forces and so forth.

There are 10 division headquarters, actually, in the Iraqi army. Now one of those, the one for Anbar province, is very, very young still. That goes -- but on the other hand, the 1st, 3rd and 5th Divisions, which were the nationally formed, the ones that MNSTC-I stood up, those actually are fairly robust division headquarters. And we're helping them now build the enablers.

One of the big efforts that won't be seen, in a sense, because it's not very exciting, is helping establish well over a hundred headquarters and support companies, for example, in the battalions. They've got these units. What we need to do is get the medical platoon, the supply platoon, the transportation platoon and the maintenance platoons all properly equipped, properly trained and so forth. And again, there's varying levels of that that have been ongoing.

Yeah?

Q Sir, would the NATO staff college speed the progress of establishing those --

GEN. PETRAEUS: It will help in the -- obviously the training of staff officers.

By the way, the staff academy is hugely important to Iraq. You actually get a red stripe on your rank when you're -- and your title thereafter is, you know, staff colonel or staff general. It is a big, big deal to them. And it's very, very important symbolically as well as substantively to them.

But that return on that investment will take about nine months or so, because the course is about -- they vary in length, junior and senior, but you can expect about eight months, and then they'll be back in the field.

By the way, another point I should have made is that another major accomplishment for the Iraqis and, frankly, for those that are helping them over the course of past year has been the development of short-, mid- and long-range plans.

You know, it's sort of obvious, but if you want, as an example -- to take the longest example, if you want somebody to graduate from West Point five years from now, you have to start now, believe it or not. You have to put them probably into language school, so they can compete effectively. You have to find somebody who's got

the level of education and so forth. And then they do their four years at West Point, and then they graduate, and then they rejoin the force. Now, smaller investment in the case of, say, a one-year at Sandhurst, or one year -- there is an Iraqi student at the Command and General Staff College, for example. There are Iraqi soldier students all over the world, literally. And, in fact, I think another one of the somewhat myths is that the Iraqis are not taking advantage of these opportunities to train overseas. They are, big time. There are over -- typically certainly over 3,100 Iraqis out of the country on a given day in training, sometimes over 3,200 or even more, depending on if there's a big endeavor out there.

Now, to be sure, the bulk of those are in Jordan, which is where the police -- one of the police academies is. It typically has around 3,000 and 3,100 in it. There's usually another hundred in that country doing a 13-week, very demanding additional course, which is actually what trains the operators in the counter-terrorist unit. And then there are others with NATO courses that can be as many as dozens out of the country at a time, or it could be in a lapse period. And then there is these onesies and twosies; they are all over the world, frankly, in a variety of different courses, and they have already gotten people back, for example, from the Australian Command and Staff College and that type of thing.

Now, these short-, mid- and long-range plans in every different area -- organizations, what do the organizations -- what do they want them to look like years from now -- so the short would be six months, 18 months, and then a couple of years out there. And again, you got to know what you want to look like several years from now to know what you need to be doing right now to get there. And that is a very, very big accomplishment that they have to look at and to be proud of, actually over the course of this past year.

Yeah.

Q General, can you comment on what specifically the type -- the level two battalions need to become level one?

GEN. PETRAEUS: It varies. Yeah. Let me talk about that.

The metrics for these levels take in several different categories. One is the level of personnel fill -- i.e., the number. You know, are they are 90 percent, 80 percent, whatever. And by the way, many of them are actually over-strength, those that have been in existence for a while. And then what about the qualifications? So these are very similar to our own readiness reports.

In command and control, there's, in a sense, a hardware and a software, if you will. Do they have the radios and the other equipment needed to conduct command and control, and then do they have the staff skills, and so forth, to do it.

Training is an assessment of their training levels in what are called mission-essential tasks. Just like in the U.S. Army, they have a list of mission-essential tasks, and that's -- they're assessed in -- and each of these have, again, to be a level one you need to be at this level and so forth. So there's an attempt to make this relatively objective, although at the end of the day some of it is going to be subjective.

Sustainment. Do they have the sustainment stuff, and can they sustain -- can they use it properly.

Level of equipment. Do they have the equipment they are authorized? And can they maintain it, and is it being maintained? Again, there's a readiness rate, and then there's a subjective evaluation of leadership.

So all these go into determining whether they are -- once they are actually out operating -- level three, level two or level one.

Yeah.

Q (Off mike) -- how long it takes to go from level two to level one?

GEN. PETRAEUS: It's a tough one, actually, because it is very, very dependent on the quality of the Iraqi leaders. I think you know that this is a society that is very responsive to leadership, good leadership, and frankly, also bad leadership. I mean, it is a culture that listens to loudspeakers. It is -- and so, it has been a culture that has been on the receive mode, by the way, a great deal, you know, over the past 20 or 30 years. So leaders are hugely important, and in fact, there's been a fair investment in them in addition to those transition teams that I described -- every battalion, brigade, division, ground forces, and et cetera, et cetera.

And by the way, with the air force they have three C-130s, by the way, that they're flying. Yes, they have U.S. coalition pilots in the right seat, or whatever. There's a very good navy. The navy challenge is instructive, actually. The navy is really quite good at their level of training, expertise and so forth. They were certified, in fact, by coalition forces. It's largely a British effort down there. The challenge for them has been, frankly, the logistical support from above. They dinged up a boat, the challenge was getting the money to repair the boat. The base support element, that piece of it, again a challenge. They actually were doing good with the contract for life support, but the incidentals and that type of thing, small spare parts, just very difficult. I mean, it's a very bureaucratic system and so there are challenges in that regard.

So again, those are the categories, if you will, that feed into these reports that determine whether they're three, two or one.

Let me just go right there. Yes?

Q General Petraeus, I'd like to follow up on Bob's question earlier about the issue of infiltration of the Iraqi security forces. How can you be sure, or how can we be sure that the Iraqis fighting alongside of our American forces are trustworthy and won't cause American soldier deaths and complicate the mission as we go down the line?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, you know, it's not just fighting alongside our forces, it is fighting alongside their fellow Iraqi forces. And the way I would answer that is to say that the best people that -- the best vetters in this whole process are those beside whom they will fight. And they will figure out who is not -- trustworthy and who isn't. And they often times will vet them out themselves. And that is, I think, critically important. And then, of course, the transition teams that are embedded with these units have a sense, again of the situation in their units.

But, you know, this is a tough challenge, and I don't want to make -- by the way, I don't want to make this all sound -- you know, this is sweetness and light. It is very, very challenging. The environment in which it's being carried out is among the -- you know, I cannot imagine a more difficult environment, frankly. And I've been in -- you know, I did Haiti, I did Bosnia, and so forth. So --

Q But how difficult will the infiltration be for the mission to be able to transition to handover? I mean, how big a problem has it become?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, I mean, it has been a problem in isolated units in isolated places. I'm not sure for our -- so much for our forces. I mean, I think the challenge has been places where there are essentially conflicted loyalties. And I think we saw a bit of that down in Basra, you know, a week or so ago. On the other hand, I tend to think that Iraqis can deal with that kind of problem, I really do. I think in the south in particular there's going to be drama, there might even be bloodshed in places like Basra, Nasiriyah, Kut and others. But those are situations with which the Iraqis can deal, which is very, very different from the -- again, the -- you know, this barbaric insurgent activity.

Yeah?

Q What is the personnel turnover in these battalions, and how will that affect long-term readiness?

GEN. PETRAEUS: It obviously varies from unit to unit, frankly, depending on where the unit is, the number of casualties that it takes. And we should not in the least diminish the casualties that they are taking. You know, candidly, when it's really austere, really tough, then again you might have more losses than you might otherwise have. However, I think that the challenges that we had back last November, when the very, very severe intimidation took its toll on units like the 3rd Division up in the Tall Afar area in western Ninevah Province and some others in Sunni Arab areas, that we have not seen that. And in fact the 3rd Division again built up, and that was the unit that provided the bulk of the battalions that were fighting in Tall Afar, along with some police commando units and some actually border forces contributed there as well.

Let me go to the back.

Q Yeah. General, my understanding is part of what makes it difficult for a lot of these battalions to function independently is the inability of the Ministry of Defense to provide them food or ammunition or transportation to get to places where they would do a mission. What is the American coalition command doing to build up the ability of the Ministry of Defense to feed its soldiers?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Good question. A great deal, is the short -- is the bumper-sticker answer to that. An enormous amount, in fact. I mean, there's everything from a national maintenance contract that has been let to provide, in a sense, a bridge capability at about -- I think it's up to eight or nine major bases at which there are large base support units. I mean, we have literally helped them develop a depot system.

And as just a pause there, I think that sometimes the scope and the complexity and the magnitude of this effort really have not been grasped by folks. In fact, sometimes I feel challenged to grasp it. But that gives you yet another -- you know, it's as if -- we're not just rebuilding the combat elements, you know, if you will, the FORSCOM of this army; we're also helping them reestablish their TRADOC, the materiel command and all of the other elements that you can possibly imagine, and all the institutions, and the joint headquarters that provides command and control at the top, and now even recently MNSTC-I picked up the mission to help with the ministry development as well, something that was done earlier by another element.

But again, starting at the very top helping reestablish a national depot, at Taji base, by the way, an enormous area, huge warehouses for all the different classes of supply. Something comes into the country, like these tens and tens of thousands of items that are flowing in, if they're army, they go to that national depot. They're parcelled out, they're actually configured in loads that then push out to the base that provides the support for the unit that draws support in an area. At that location there's what's called a base support unit. It has a central issue facility, has its own mini-warehouse system, and then the unit comes, draws the items from it and then takes it.

On the life-support issue, that is generally a contract issue. In truth, the Iraqis have taken the hand-off of, I think it was, up to eight or so bases by the time I left, with others regularly shifting over. And in general -- although, again, there's some midnight drama at times -- they have done okay with that, and life support. And I ate at a lot of the different mess halls and bases and so forth.

The challenge has been when you get into expeditionary operations, such as in western Anbar Province, for example, because they don't yet have the robust expeditionary logistics that enable them to do what armies like the U.S. Army can do, where you can literally fix in the field, feed in the field, maintain in the field, all the rest of that. And again, we are helping them develop that.

At the very bottom level, as I mentioned, that's the piece of the headquarters and support unit in each

battalion. And then it goes to the base support unit, which provides the area support, then up to the national depot and so on. And that's where there is actually a combat service and support institute that has been established up at Taji as well, which trains logistic staff officers, maintainers, supply folks and others along with a couple of other branch schools up there, as I mentioned, engineers, medics. Intelligence is up there as well. There's a signal one that's forming. There's an infantry basic training and so forth.

By the way, I'm happy to report that the basic training for an infantryman in the Iraqi army, who's an individual replacement, is -- there's a common core basic training, which is five weeks and then there's the add-on now. It's actually branched out to where the add-ons target the specific skill. So if they go to be a truck driver, they get an initial add-on. The add-on is longest for the infantry, which confirms what I've always long felt, that it takes longer to train a light infantryman than a doctor, I think, but anyway.

Yeah. Go ahead.

Q General, can you tell me how important is it that these Iraqis that you're training up understand and appreciate the sort of standards of human rights, the Western world understanding?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Oh. Huge. Thank you for asking. Yup. It's very important, and it is embedded in their training. We did recently -- not we anymore. I mean, this is the Iraqis now. But the Iraqis recently put out quite a campaign to, in a sense -- or underscore the importance of the treatment of others. The Ministry of Interior, in particular, took that on because there were challenges within the Ministry of Interior police commandos in particular. The good news is that they were the most aggressive forces in Iraq. Sometimes the bad news was that they were the most aggressive forces, and they had at one point in time a very substantial number of detainees.

Helped them develop a detainee facility. Helped them develop a much more legalistic approach to that, if you will, and so again, there is great sensitivity. By the way, both of the ministers with whom we dealt on a regular basis -- the minister of Interior, who by the way is a Shi'a Arab, in the Ministry of Defense, who is a Sunni Arab -- they were very sensitive to that. They were very sensitive to the issue and the need for integrity. That was particularly important in the Ministry Defense where, as you know, there was some corruption problems certainly not to the tune of a billion dollars as reported, but some subset of that, that was used to buy stuff. That was Iraqi money, by the way, not MNSTC-I or coalition money, and that was not that transparent or clear to us. And we were not the advisors at that time so.

Q Can I just real quickly follow up on that?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yup.

Q How do you communicate to people who, you know, some of whom are motivated to join this force by seeing such horrible things happening to members of their own family and their home communities? How do you communicate to them that a strong arm is not the way to go at these folks, that you need to respect human rights against the enemy that's not respecting it against --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yup. Yup. Yup. I mean, just candidly you do the same thing that, I think, we've had to do with our own forces when our own forces have not lived up to the standard, and you do it anyway. I mean, it is part of basic training, but then it becomes really big-time refresher training. And those -- for the forces that were stood up by Iraqis in particular, at one point in time they were standing forces up because of the -- they felt a compelling need to get forces on the street, in particular for the 30 January elections. There was an effort, literally, to go back to them and make sure that they had, in fact, gotten that message. That is not to say there aren't going to be problems with that again in the future, because when you see the horrific things done to your buddies that the insurgents and the terrorists have done to them, it is enormously challenging, I think, not to take similar actions.

Q General, could I ask something in conjunction with what he asked? You -- you've --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Only for you.

Q -- you've spoken here about training of officers, in large measure, and you --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yeah. Yep. No, NCOs as well. There is a non-commissioned officer academy, I should add, by the way. Platoon sergeant course, a squad leader course, national squad leader course, and a platoon sergeant course, and now even a first sergeant course starting. And there eventually will be a sergeant major's academy.

Q But -- but that's my point, too --

GEN. PETRAEUS: So, that is a long-term effort because the non-commissioned officer element of the Iraqi army, like most of the armies in the region, was not a strong point. And typically, officers did what in our formations in many cases non-commissioned officers do. So that's going to take some degree of cultural change, and even generational change, as will a number of these different efforts.

Q That's -- that's -- that's my point.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yep.

Q Are you finding it difficult to get officers, many of whom previously served in the Iraqi army --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Right.

Q -- and as you said, mirrors --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Just about all of them, by the way. And this is where they come from. Yeah.

Q -- mirrors the Iraqi people's tendency to be subservient to, perhaps, the wrong authority -- listen to loudspeakers -- is it difficult to get many of these officers in the Iraqi army to accept the idea that noncoms are important and should be given the lead -- given their head --

GEN. PETRAEUS: No, I actually think that intellectually they accept that. The challenge --

Q Well, because they've seen the American military.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yeah. And they want to be -- frankly, they want to be very much like the U.S. military. In fact, they'd like F-16s and, you know, Polaris submarines and aircraft carriers and a whole bunch of other things. And we want to get them the necessary things -- wheeled armored vehicles. But in practice, the challenge is not reverting to what you know. And so, the -- and that will, again, take time, it will take training, it will take education, it will take some mentoring and assistance and a little bit of general guiding. But we see that in units. There are Iraqi sergeants major out there that -- in fact, on Haifa Street. I walked Haifa Street, by the way, with an Iraqi patrol. And in that patrol was an Iraqi non-commissioned officer who proudly wore U.S. command sergeant major stripes. And they had been pinned on him by his counterpart sergeant major.

And by the way, there's also partnership programs which I should have mentioned. Every single unit in the Iraqi army has a coalition partner that is above and beyond, again, the transition team effort, so that they provide assistance and mentoring as well.

But he wore that, and he was very, very proud to be the command sergeant major of that battalion with which we walked right down the center of Haifa Street, which used to be known, again, as "Purple Heart Boulevard." Did a similar thing through the Abu Ghraib marketplace about a month before leaving. He did say to me, "General, we need continued support for the role of the non-commissioned officer. We need to get the non-commissioned officer academy out at Kirkush Military Training Base going" -- which, by the way, it has been happening. And he had a variety of other requests very much, actually, along the lines of what you're talking about.

So -- over here. Yeah?

Q General, I did the math here, which I hope holds up; 36 level-two battalions is something like 28,800 troops, so, say, less than 30,000 troops. For folks at home trying to understand --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, let me -- let me -- let me draw this out for you. Let me just take this, because I see where you're going. I have had some of these questions more than once before.

It is not just army units. That's just, again, army and police combat units. First of all, do not diminish the value of level-three units. As I mentioned, just to give you an example, it's a level-three unit that's on the Baghdad Airport Road. I'm pretty sure that's one of those level-three units doing a very important task, albeit with a coalition unit; it's not got the battlespace completely. And again, many of the units that you see manning tough locations, checkpoints, and so forth, will be level-three units. So they're really pretty important.

Beyond that, though, at the very least there are the 68,000-plus Iraqi police, which -- and they are what you see on the streets of a city like Baghdad. When you drive around Baghdad on, you know, every street corner, in fact, you'll see a traffic policemen, you'll see patrol policemen moving around in their vehicles, and you'll see station policemen as well.

So again, there's much, much more. We haven't talked at all about the borders, by the way, which are over 17,000 in that 197,000 figure. They're an element that needs greater emphasis and assistance. But in those -- again -- a number of those contributing substantially.

I didn't talk about the highway patrol; their version of the Secret Service, which is over 600, that are now, by the way, much greater degree protecting their tier-one officials; that is their president, prime minister and the three vice presidents.

Q But what I'm trying to understand is -- and again, I'm way oversimplifying this, but how do you replace 140,000 U.S. troops with 30,000 level two, and what is the --

GEN. PETRAEUS: You're not replacing them with level two. You're replacing them with level two, level three, policemen, border guards, highway patrol, combat support. And remember, it's not 140,000 -- I don't know what our tooth-to-tail ratio is in the U.S. Army, but I guarantee you that it is a lot lower, vastly lower, than the tooth-to-tail ratio of the Iraqi security forces, which, in fact, is something we're trying to correct because in fact it is all tooth and not as much as tail as it will need to be. And in fact, that's by design. The objective was to get Iraqi infantry battalions into the fight, knowing that we could support them through a variety of different ways, coalition and contracts -- that's what's being done -- and then bringing along -- I mean, you can't do everything at once, even though we have tried it various times -- and then bringing along the logistical elements, support units, command and control, and so forth. So --

Q So I guess I'm trying to understand if you folks have a rule of thumb or a guideline you're using to -- what is the number of level two troops -- do they need to double, triple, whatever -- before the United States could realistically start to think about drawing down?

GEN. PETRAEUS: There is no arithmetic relationship or mechanistic formula that I can give you, because, again, I would have to fall back, frankly, on the conditions issue. There are level two units, again, that have completely replaced coalition forces in places like Karbala, Najaf, much of the south. I mean, if you -- I don't know if any of you have been in the south at all recently, but if you drive through Kut Hillah, Karbala, Najaf, Diwaniyah, Samawa, Nasiriyah and even Basra, what you will see is Iraqis -- Iraqi police, by the way, which again you didn't have -- that's not in that calculation you did. You'll see units -- Iraqi army units, which -- many of which will be level three, because they were lower priority in terms of equipping, training, radios and some of the other issues, because we prioritized those to those that were solidly in the fight. So conditions have an enormous amount to do with this.

You know, I came home through Afghanistan, by the way, and we looked at the -- at the forces over there. Different levels of resources have been applied, different levels of development. But because the environment is so much more permissive, forces that don't have all the body armor, Kevlars and heavy machine guns and all the rest of that that the Iraqi security forces have, with much more to come in terms of armored equipment, can very much handle the situation.

So that's why General Casey's been so clear about establishing the point about conditions, and that's very, very important.

Q General?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yeah?

Q General, Senator Levin said today that the numbers of battalions and their readiness levels that are given in classified sessions are different than the ones that have been given in public. I wonder if you could address that.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, I've characterized for you -- over 115 means that there are more than 115 -- in the classified slides. Over 36 means that there's, you know, a little over 36. I mean, if I could get it over 40, I'd tell you it was over 40.

So I mean, I think we've been pretty -- we've worked hard to -- by the way, this is what we provide to Congress. You know, I think, as a readiness report -- in fact, they lump together level one and level two, the equivalent of those. So -- in the unclassified report that goes to Congress.

Now we also -- I have briefed every congressional delegation that came through Iraq, and there were a fair number of those, and they all came through MNSTC-I. We briefed each of them on the Iraqi security forces classified numbers. And again, you know, take a little bit more than 115, take a little bit more than 36, and I think they gave you one. So it's not too hard to do the math. And they are not different in that sense. I mean, it's -- yeah, it's a little bit more than what I gave you, because I got to characterize, rather than give you the specific numbers. And again, there's discussion about, you know, just lay it all out, and so forth.

So -- yeah?

Q And a final point. This is really more of a plea than a question.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yeah.

Q This has been helpful information you've provided today. And granted, you're not in this job anymore. But it would be very, very helpful for us to get this more regularly --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Sure.

Q -- in terms of updates about roughly how many are in each level, even considering the classification issue.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yep. Well, I will call General Dempsey when I'm done here and suggest to him that a highlight of his month could be a monthly update to the Pentagon press corps. (Laughter.) So --

Q That would be great!

GEN. PETRAEUS: No, actually, I mean, I think I've been fairly open to folks that are in this room. So --

Q General, what --

MR. WHITMAN: Let's make this the last one.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Oh, yeah. The army troops are -- overall, Ministry of Defense is 91,422. Overall Ministry of Interior -- overall -- is 105,780. Which is how you get over 197,000.

Yeah?

Q General, one of the things that came up in the hearings last week was that police weren't being paid. How much of a problem is that? And to what extent is that because of corruption?

GEN. PETRAEUS: No. The challenge with police pay is, A -- at least when I left it was a relatively isolated issue. Now, there are some cases in which they've got to ferret out is it a legitimate pay problem or is it a case where they are trying to get yet back pay for the so-called Najaf security volunteers during the election or something like this. And you get sort of mixed -- and you have to ferret that out, and we've got to help you with that.

There is a challenge where the Ministry of Interior is looking forward and saying that they are going to run out of pay at a certain point, and they have asked their Ministry of Finance for additional resources. In fact, they asked to reprogram money from their construction and equipment lines -- because we were going to do that for them; are planning and have been doing that for them -- into the personnel, that plus a request for a supplemental, that I believe was around \$150 million, or something like that. And their Ministry of Finance is still working that through.

So that's really the issue. There are also almost always, again, isolated cases where for some reason or other, the pay list -- remember how the pay list works. I think folks forget there's no banking system in Iraq. There is no check to bank. There's no electronic funds transfer. So the way the process works is that out in the hinterlands -- and they're way out there with the police, and the border forces in particular. They gradually assemble to the province level a list, the pay list, which is then -- and it's approved at each level and stamped by the appropriate officials.

It's then taken by a paymaster, if you will, from the Ministry of Interior, brought physically to the ministry, where it is then approved additionally. And then money is transferred actually from the Ministry of Finance, a check is cut that goes back, they then cash that check in a bank in a local area that has money, that holds money. And that's all they do do, is holding money. And that money, of course, is cash, and it's distributed by ground vehicle, typically, out there by the Iraqi Ministry of Finance.

That is cashed there and then the money goes out, just like our army used to do when I first came in. You have a paymaster who pays each individual policeman; you know, they sign, and all the rest of that. It's a very, very cumbersome system. And if somebody doesn't get it right out there at any one of these different steps, or it's

interdicted or there's some other problem on a particular day, then there's a lag in pay, and that is something that we've been battling and helping the Iraqis battle all throughout the time.

Let me get somebody else that hasn't asked. Yes, sir?

Q Talk, if you would, about the relationship between the national forces you've been training and the militia. You mentioned there was an effort to attract militia into the national forces. How successful has that been?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, it was a policy that has been in existence since actually before the transition of sovereignty, called the Transition and Reintegration of Militia, TRM, and it was overseen by what was called the TRC, which was the Transition and Reintegration Committee. We had targeted recruiting in accordance with the directions of the Transition and Reintegration Committee that recruited at the Baghdad recruiting stations -- which, by the way, again, are run by Iraqis now -- where they would have Badr Corps Day or Communist Party Day, as I mentioned, or Peshmerga Day, or you name it, and they would then go in and come in as individuals, though, John. And so they were not coming in as units, ever. And they would then go wherever. For the national forces, the army forces or the national police forces, they go wherever the needs of that particular ministry are.

There clearly are elements or there are members or former members of those militias who also entered the police at various times, in particular, I suspect, back in that fall of '03. And again, those have had some conflicted loyalties out there at various times. But I think, truthfully, that that is something, again, that Iraqis can deal with and they can resolve, actually. And I think that they have proven in general that they have, albeit not without drama at various times.

We are not helping militias in any way, shape or form. And again, that is something, again, that the Iraqis have to resist the temptation to resort to, which would be to use them, which would be a very short-term expedient, but would cause long-term problems.

Final -- final one, I think, here.

Q You may have addressed this already, but I want to get into the issue of sustainment in the field of the Iraqi forces.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yes. Yep.

Q That's something people on the Hill have brought up quite a bit.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yep. Yep.

Q And what seems to be the problem there? Is it a money issue just to get them equipment?

GEN. PETRAEUS: No.

Q Is -- is it recruiting? Is it training?

GEN. PETRAEUS: No. No, no. It's none of the above. I mean, there's no problem recruiting. As I mentioned earlier, there's plenty of recruits out there. The challenge is one, literally, of just developing capacity and capability. I mean, you don't develop support commands, you don't develop a national depot, a national warehouse system, the people to run it who are trained -- you know, there's actually a computer database, for example, every item --

I mean, just to give you an idea of the kind of challenge that we had, we started creating a database for spare parts. Well, you know, in the U.S. system it took us years, but we eventually developed a common FSN -- federal stock number. I forget how many digits it is. But so, if you want to order any widget for any piece of equipment, you just go to a particular on-line deal and you can find the federal stock number and you can order that particular part.

Of course, there were no federal stock numbers. So we had to figure out how do we literally do a numbering system so that when we put something in the warehouse we can go back and figure out that for this particular make, model, piece of equipment, that that spare part or component is available, and then you can access that, and others can have visibility of it, by the way, so they can tell that it's there -- order it, place orders, get it assembled on pallets, put on trucks, and then driven out with security to the particular base support unit.

So it's just a very, very complex endeavor. And again, it was a very conscious choice to focus first the major effort on getting forces out in the field that could fight, knowing that we would have to provide the logistics and sustain that support for some period of time. As I mentioned earlier, we're now helping them train all the way from the national depot down to the battalions, which were each headquarters and support company, which will have a medical platoon, maintenance platoon, transportation platoon and a supply platoon that's -- at that level down there with base support units in between that have warehouses, central issue facilities and all the rest.

Q Overall, when do you hope to get that to a level --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, it's coming on line. Again, all of this is in the process of coming on-line. And with each month, you know, they develop better. The headquarters and support companies I think was the early part, or the mid-part of the spring, I believe was those. But again, I -- that's one we probably ought to refer back to MNSTC-I because I'm scratching back into the gray matter on that one.

So again, logistics is very challenging. And it's actually challenging for our own forces. And I think you know that the challenges for us as we went into Iraq, in fact, particularly when it comes to expeditionary logistics, which is what is so challenging when you start to try to move substantial numbers of Iraqi forces out into, say, western Anbar, where there are no base support units -- the nearest one is back in between a -- Fallujah and Ramadi -- and sustaining them, supporting them and so forth is difficult. But over time, again, that capability will come up. We also have let a very substantial -- couple months -- some months back now a national maintenance contract, which not only serves as a bridge, if you will, to help keep the vehicles going, build the spare parts, the tools, the -- but also to train, in fact, Iraqi mechanics, supply officers and specialists and so forth in these base support units that are a critical linchpin, so that you have a combination of unit and fixed-base logistics.

So well, I'm getting the hook-sign here now, and I do need to go on to a couple of other events. And again, I would tell you that this certainly beat packing out household goods by a long stretch, and I thank you for that.

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