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**Presenter: Lt. Gen. Martin Dempsey, commander, Multi-national Security Transition Command-Iraq**

**March 24,  
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## DoD News Briefing with Lt. Gen. Dempsey

(Note: General Dempsey appears via teleconference from Iraq.)

BRYAN WHITMAN (Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Good evening, General Dempsey. This is Bryan Whitman at the Pentagon. Can you hear me?

GEN. DEMPSEY: I can, Bryan. How are you?

MR. WHITMAN: I'm doing fine. Thank you for joining us today, General, and good morning here to the Pentagon press corps. Our briefer today doesn't need much of an introduction. This is Lieutenant General Martin Dempsey. He's the commander of the Multinational Security Transition Command in Iraq. He's responsible for assisting the Iraqi government in the development, organization, training, equipping and sustaining of the Iraqi security forces.

Most of you remember General Dempsey as the 1st Armored Division commander during OIF, where he commanded that unit for some 14 months. He last talked to us here, I think, in December time frame. And we appreciate you taking the time and give us -- giving us the opportunity to hear again from you and ask you a few questions, General.

With that, let me turn it over to you.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Thanks.

Good morning, and thanks to all of you for meeting with me today. Hello to those of you whom I've met over here in the past. And for those of you that haven't been here, "Ahlan wa Sahlan." Welcome. We'll -- we'd be happy to see you over here any time.

It's obvious to all of us that this is a critical moment in this mission. So I'm happy to have the opportunity to share my personal perspectives with you.

As many of you know and as Bryan just mentioned, I'm in my 21st month in Iraq. I was here for 14 months the first time, and tomorrow it will be seven as the third commander of MNSTC-I. And that's my first point.

What we're seeing now is progress on a three-year investment in Iraq's security forces. It's been a big investment, and it's yielding big progress.

My second point is that MNSTC-I is all about transition -- transition from us to our Iraqi partners.

MNSTC-I stands for Multinational Security Transition Command. In the beginning, the emphasis was on the "S" for security; now the focus is firmly on the "T" for transition. Let me give you a few examples of where transition is occurring all the time.

Transition of battlespace. This is the one that probably gets the most notoriety and almost all of the attention, but actually it's only one part of the larger equation. Transition of responsibility for Iraq's borders. Transition of plans and policies inside Iraq's joint headquarters. Transition of business practices inside of Iraq's two security ministries. Transition of accountability and financial responsibility. Transition of control for Iraq military and police education and training.

Now, naturally there are ups and downs, stops and starts, wins and losses in transition just as there are in battles, but we are as resolute in transitioning Iraqi staffs into the lead in headquarters and ministries as we are in transitioning Iraqi commanders into the lead in the field. And it's important to note that our Iraqi counterparts are eager for the responsibility.

Before I take your questions, let me just take a moment to praise the young men and women who are over here doing this work with me. They are determined, courageous and inspirational, and so are their families who support them.

What are your questions?

MR. WHITMAN: Let's go ahead and get started right here with Mr. Burns.

Q General Dempsey, it's Bob Burns from AP. Could you give us the latest breakdown on the levels of rating for the Iraqi Army battalions? We last heard there were zero at level one. And also could you explain why there haven't been more progressing to that level over time?

GEN. DEMPSEY: No, the answer is I can't give you that because I don't track the TRA levels except monthly when I get -- when they are reviewed with General Casey, General Chiarelli and I together. And that's because that's really an internal management tool for us to make sure they've got the right people, the right equipment, the right training, the right leadership, the right systems in place and so forth.

What I do track and can talk to you about if you like is the battlespace that's been handed over, because that's a far better metric, we think, of capability.

Q Can I follow up?

MR. WHITMAN: Sure, go ahead.

Q Well, I'd like to hear about the battlespace figures, if you could break that down. But also, I'm curious why you can't discuss the levels, since that was reported to Congress about a month ago. I just wanted to get an update.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah, not from me, though. I mean, I'm sure someone has them. That's not something I commit to memory, as I say, because we deal with it once a month as we assess the next month.

And so the battlespace numbers are two divisions, 13 brigades and 49 battalions that have battlespace, and on the national police side -- two brigades and six battalions. And that number continues to increase on a monthly basis.

MR. WHITMAN: Will?

Q General, this is Will Dunham with Reuters. Last week, General Chiarelli said that the goal was for Iraqi security forces to control about 75 percent of Iraq by the end of this summer. Could you tell us what parts of Iraq this will involve? And could you also say how much of the country the Iraqi security forces are expected to control by the end of this year?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah, I'm not sure I can put a much finer edge on it than Pete did in his briefing to you. I mean, I -- we do talk constantly about the growing capabilities and how that transitions into control of space; meaning, ground. He said 75 percent, and he manages that piece of this enterprise. My piece of the enterprise is to make sure that I'm producing the units and the training base; that's at the low end, and then at the top end, that I'm producing the institutions that have the systems in place -- pay systems, promotion systems, procurement systems, contracting systems -- that actually will support all of that. And then the underpinning of all of that that we both work together and with our Iraqi partners is the professionalization of this force, because at the end of the day that's what will ensure this thing endures and contributes to a democratic system over time.

So I can't put a finer edge on it than Pete did.

Q A follow-up. How about the second part regarding by the end of the year, what amount of the country do you think the Iraqi security forces will be able to control?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, as I recall in Pete's briefing, he said that he thought that 75 percent of Iraq would be in -- under the control of Iraqi security forces by the end of the year. So I stand by that.

Now, I do have a little more knowledge of the borders because that's on the police side of things. There's about -- not about -- there's 3,631 kilometers of borders, and by this summer, July, Iraq's security forces will be responsible for security along that entire front. So I'm not sure if that helps.

MR. WHITMAN: Let's go to Pam.

Q General Dempsey, it's Pam Hess with United Press International. Tony Cordesman from CSIS put out a report this week, a short one, about security forces, and he said that battlespace is not a good metric, because I think he was suggesting that much of the battlespace that the Iraqis control is empty, and so it looks like they're doing more than they actually are, and that in the places where the problems are, where the real population centers are, they're not.

Could you explain that or clarify?

GEN. DEMPSEY: I'll comment on it. I don't know if I can explain it because Tony said it, although Tony and I exchange e-mails quite frequently, as did my predecessor with Tony.

At this point in time he's probably correct in that the battlespace that has been handed over is, to some degree, in those parts of the country that have achieved a level of security both because of the capability of the security forces, but also because there's less threat.

That's not true in Baghdad, however, where about 50 percent of the city is under the direct control of

Iraqi security forces. And it's certainly not the case as you walk your way north.

So, at this point in time, Tony has a valid point, but that point begins to lose its validity as we continue to hand over space. And 75 percent of Iraq certainly will include more than a few parts of it that are both heavily populated and very contested.

Q As an unrelated follow-up, there was an attack in -- there was an attack in Baqubah on a police station I think in the last week. Fourteen police were killed. And we've heard of other incidents.

Would you walk us around the country and tell us what you're seeing with police being attacked and how they're doing in fighting back and if they're staying on the job?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah, I've got a terrible distortion here, but I think what you said is if I could give you an assessment of how the police are doing around the country. Is that a fair restatement of the question?

Q It is. Specifically I've been hearing about a lot of attacks on police stations. And I know of one in Baqubah that was pretty serious; 14 police were killed. I think that many of the insurgents were killed. So if you could give us specifics about incidents -- where and when, what the casualties were, and what the results of them have been, if the police have stayed on the job, how you're feeling.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah. I think it might be more useful for me to point out that the security forces, the better they do, the more they become a threat to the other forces inside of Iraq that don't want this thing to succeed, and so absolutely, they're targeted more frequently. And that tends to particularly be the case in Baghdad, just south of Baghdad, just north of Baghdad, and not surprisingly, just west of Baghdad. That is to say the thing that over time has kind of been described as the Sunni Triangle.

So, I'm aware of the one you talked about, the police station, and probably two others since the 22nd of February. And of course we're watching things a little more carefully since the 22nd of February to try to be clear -- to gain as clear an understanding of how much is insurgent activity, terrorist activity, sectarian violence, and so forth. So I'm aware of two incidents; there may be more. But those are the two that come to mind.

Now, I'll tell you, it's important to note that the Iraqi police are standing their ground, when in fact, in my last tour here that just simply wasn't the case. If they were attacked in the front of the building, then they exited through the back of the building, and the police station and all the equipment tended to be lost. But that hasn't been the case for a long time over here.

MR. WHITMAN: Let's go to Jim.

Q Okay. General, Jim Miklaszewski, NBC. You mentioned the business practices of the ministries. I assume you're talking about Interior and Defense. Just what kind of progress is being made in that regard? And how critical is it that these ministries be rid of sort of the inherent incompetence, cronyism, tribalism and corruption, to the future performance of Iraqi security forces?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, to your latter point, how important it is that the civil servants, let's call them, in the two ministries work in support of a national -- of a government of national unity, and on behalf of the Iraqi security forces which, incidentally, are far more diverse, particularly on the army side, then generally is known even in this country. And so we've got a bit of a PR effort, a public confidence effort that we're working at both levels on for the Iraqi security forces in the field and also the two ministries. But it is important that these commanders and their soldiers, or these police leaders and their policemen, believe that back in Baghdad, where policies are being made on pay and promotion, retirement and health benefits, that those forces in the field have confidence that they're being taken care of over time.

Now, how is that working? It's working well. I mean the policies -- I would describe it this way. The policies are generally in place. The implementation is progressing at a measured pace, not a pace certainly that we would expect to see if we were talking about the Pentagon, of all places. But the point is there that these new civil servants -- because that's what they are, particularly in the Ministry of Defense, it's an entirely new team over there, there's some learning as we go, in that regard.

Also, most of the policies made in a place like a ministry have resource implications, and specifically monetary implications. And Iraq's budget is very -- their security budget is very modest this year.

And so it'll take a couple of budget cycles before these processes mature to the point where we think they'll be adequate.

Q And to follow up, please, following the bombing of the golden mosque in Samarra, there was evidence that some militias, particularly Muqtada al-Sadr, were permitted by Iraqi security forces to operate freely in parts of Baghdad, Sadr City, obviously. What sort of discussions had the U.S. had with those in the Interior Ministry about that situation? And is that situation likely to continue, whereby these militias are allowed to operate freely?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Let me talk to you about militias in general. And I think we've got -- I got to sharpen the language a bit, because there are some militias that are recognized even as far back as the CPA orders, captured again in the TAL, the Transitional Administrative Law, and even in the constitution they're recognized. Those militias -- Badr Corps, Peshmerga -- there's places that they can be accounted for in those legal documents. And we've actually assimilated a good number of them into the security forces.

Then there's militias that are not recognized militias. So we've got to be careful about the use of the term. And you mentioned one of them, Jaysh al-Mahdi.

Now, what happened in the aftermath of the Samarra mosque bombing was that several of these militias took to the streets, took to the streets in a way that could have been very threatening to the population, particularly in the next areas.

My report to you from personal observation is that the Iraqi legitimate security forces, the army and the police, in every case were a settling influence. And essentially what they did -- they made a conscious decision. Because of the other tensions in the air, they made a conscious decision not to confront but rather to contain these militias. Stated another way, they decided that they wouldn't add the militia problem to their other problem, which is the heightened tensions after the bombing.

Now, that's not to say that they allowed anyone to commit any crimes or acts against groups. They separated groups. They protected mosques. They talked to political leaders, religious leaders, politicians, local leaders, and they really did a fantastic job of settling the situation without also confronting the militia.

That militia problem or, as I've really chosen to start calling it now, the extragovernmental armed groups, to separate them from the legitimate or at least recognized militias -- that's something the new government's got to take on with some immediacy as soon as they get seated.

MR. WHITMAN: Let's go to the other Jim -- Jim Mannion.

Q General, this is Jim Mannion from Agence France-Presse.

I wonder if you could go in a bit more detail in the -- into the ethnic make-up of the units in the army and

particularly the extent to which the Sunnis are represented. I ask that because there's some analysts who are making the case or arguing that it's the security forces themselves that in sense are fueling the ethnic -- or the sectarian tensions because they're perceived by Sunnis as being a, essentially, a Shi'ite-Kurd super militia. So -- could you please address both those things: the extent to which the Sunnis are being incorporated -- or are incorporated in the army, and this view that they're Shi'ite-Kurd militias?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah, sure. In fact, I'll give you sort of a summary of where we stand on both counts. The army -- the odd number divisions, 1, 3, 5, 6 -- I know that's not an odd number -- 7 and 9 tend to be diverse because they were recruited nationally, they were formed nationally, and they have a national fabric to them -- representation. Even in those divisions, the leadership tends to be a little more heavily weighted on the Sunni side, but not dramatically so. I mean, because the former -- we've been able to hand pick the former officers to come back, and we've done so with -- I say we, us and our Iraqi counterparts -- with an eye both on credentials and ethnic diversity. The army and the -- particularly the odd number divisions plus the 6th in Baghdad tend to be pretty diverse.

Two, 4, 8 and 10, because they started life as the Iraqi National Guard -- really they started as the Iraq Civil Defense Corps, evolved into the national guard and then were merged into the army -- they have a little less diversity and a more -- a local fabric to them, but over time that's being adjusted as they need replacements. The national recruiting pool and the national training base make the replenishment.

So for the army, we've got a clear vision of how that is all coming together in terms of ethnic diversity.

The national police. There's two kinds of national police: Commandos and Public Order Battalions. The commandos are diverse because they were grown that way. The Public Order kind of grew up and responds to a need at the time of the January '05 elections. They were recruited at a time when the Sunni had essentially opted out of the process, and so the Sunni didn't step forward to be recruited. And the fabric of the Public Order Battalions tends to be more heavily weighted than -- with Shi'a than the national demographic, as we understand it, would suggest.

And that has to be worked over time. In fact, recently the minister of Interior, at our suggestion, agreed to merge the two national police forces together, which will have, in fact, a leveling effect in terms of national ethnic representation.

With our Iraqi counterparts on the MOI as well, we're very careful about how leads these groups. It's actually more important who leads them and how that is divided ethnically than the rank and file.

And finally, the local police are local police, and so if you're talking about the police in Najaf, I guarantee you they're 100 percent Shi'a, probably. And if you're talking about the police out in western Al Anbar, you're probably talking about 100 percent Sunni. But, I mean, that's what local police are supposed to be, in terms of representing the population within which they live and work.

Q To follow up?

MR. WHITMAN: Let's go over here to Tom, then I'll come back to you.

Q General, Tom Bowman with the Baltimore Sun. In your opening statement about the transition to the Iraqi forces, I didn't hear you use the term "logistics." Last year General Petraeus told us that the plan was for a national depot to be set up, and then sub- depots, transportation units, to get the equipment and supplies to the Iraqi forces. Can you give us an assessment how far along that is, how long it will take? And do you assume -- clearly, this is complex. Do you assume U.S. forces will be providing logistics for years to come?

GEN. DEMPSEY: It is complex and it's really very far along, and it is exactly as Dave briefed it to you last year. We've had the plan. We mentioned very minor modifications based on lessons as we've moved units around the country, for example, Tall Afar and out west into the western Euphrates. But essentially there is today a national depot in Taji 20 kilometers north of Baghdad, there's five regional support units -- sub-depots, as you referred to them -- two, one for each two divisions; 10 divisions, five regional support units -- linked down to the battalion level by motor transport regiment. All of that will be built in place by October or so.

Now, it's important to note that building it doesn't mean it's going to spring into action immediately. It's going to take some time. It's going to need some reps before it's ready to walk away from it, just like anything else. But the capacity will be built within the calendar year 2006, and then we'll have to determine how quickly it can become self-sustaining, just as we do with a combat unit.

Q (Off mike) -- how long the U.S. will be providing logistics for the Iraqi forces; two, three or more years, five years?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, it's not necessarily that way. I mean, really it's the same question you might ask Pete Chiarelli about how long will you have to provide support for the combat battalions. I mean, they're really one and the same question. And that's because it really comes down to a couple of things.

The enemy will get a vote. It depends on how the enemy successfully or unsuccessfully attacks this system we're building, and how quickly the logisticians of the Iraqi army understand and actually learn how to use the thing. Some of it will depend on the Iraqi army's budget, because they have to have a system in place for life support contracts: food, fuel, field sanitation, and electricity; and they've got to build up a stockage of repair parts. All of that, though, is working today at some level, and in fact, we've had some great successes with Iraqi Ministry of Defense picking up life support contracts at some of these regional support units. Other places, the life support contract's been put in place and it failed. We had a couple that that happened to out in Al Anbar province for a couple of reasons; one would be very obvious to you -- the distances involved, and the other was the enemy situation.

So, you know, we're putting this system in place and we're allowing it to function. We've got transition teams in place with the logisticians, just as we do with the combat units. We assess them every month and then we make -- we adjust as we need to and as we go. But the system will be built this year, and I don't know how it will do, but I'm actually quite confident that it will do what it's intended to do, and then it will be up to Pete Chiarelli, General Casey and I to determine how much support we have to provide over time.

MR. WHITMAN: Let's go to Jon.

Q General Dempsey, back to the question of the sectarian make-up -- Jon Karl, ABC News -- the sectarian make-up of the security forces. You went through and said some are diverse, some are not so diverse. Can you quantify at all? Can you give us a sense, you know, how diverse? What is the Sunni participation?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah, that's a good question because I should have noted when I answered the previous question.

We have in mind that the ethnic mix of the Iraqi security forces should be reflective of the nation -- not perfectly so, because we don't really know perfectly so what the ethnic mix of the nation is. But generally speaking, if a unit is about 65 or -- 60 to 65 percent Shi'a, 20 percent or so Sunni, and you know, 15 to 20 percent Kurd, we figure we have it about right. And then, as I said, though, what we really focus on -- I mean, I don't have the documentation with me, but with our Iraqi counterparts we track exactly who's in command at battalion, brigade and division level. And as we put leaders into those divisions, we mix and match so that the

ethnic diversity is present in the leadership, not just in the rank and file.

I mean, I'll give you a topical example -- current example. As you know, General Mubdar, the 6th Division commander, was assassinated about three weeks ago now. A fine commander, by the way. And we're going through -- in fact, I have a meeting tomorrow with the leaders of the Joint Headquarters, then we'll go to the Ministry of Defense together and lay out a slate for them with rationale. And one of the criteria is we think that in this particular case this leader should have both the credential and be a certain ethnic -- represent a certain ethnic party.

So it's -- there's a system in place to monitor it, and we use those benchmarks I mentioned and get as close to them as we can.

MR. WHITMAN: Let's go over to Wendy. I saw your hand earlier, maybe you don't now.

Gordon.

Q General, Gordon Lubold from Army Times. You touched on corruption with the police earlier. I wonder if you could talk a little more about it.

In the past you talked about the bad habits of the police forces and how you try to kind of walk away from that. Can you talk a little bit about your ability to equip the police and how those bad habits hamstring you in terms of equipping them and standing them up on their own?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah, let me talk about corruption and abuse and criminal conduct and any number of things. Let me discuss it this way. These things are going to happen. I mean, we're not going to create the perfect security force, and even in our complete image, not that we're perfect, but we're not going to create a force that is without its challenges in terms of its conduct.

But here's the difference, it seems to me. In former times, in the former regime, the kind of conduct we're talking about -- corruption, ethnic divisiveness, embezzlement, human rights abuses -- those kinds of conduct were actually condoned. They were in some cases even a matter of policy. What we're trying to do is build a system where that kind of conduct is punished. And in fact we have cases -- clear cases, any number of cases where that kind of conduct brought to their attention is punished -- units changed, leaders changed. We've even had recently an entire organization dispersed because one of the ministers decided that the conduct of the leadership of the organization probably indicated it was doing some things that were not helpful to the formation of a national unity government.

So, you know, that's really the key. It's not that these things are not going to occur. Let me be perfectly blunt, they are going to occur. But if they begin to punish conduct like that, change leaders and then publicize it as a way of gaining public confidence, then I think we will have gotten where we need to be.

Q How difficult does it make it to equip the forces, then, give them stuff?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Actually, I think we've probably overcome most of the challenges related to corruption and equipping. And what I mean by that is we are so tightly connected to the minister of Defense, director general for acquisition, logistics and infrastructure; and on the MOI side, the director general of acquisition and logistics; and inside the Joint Headquarters, the M4, who's the logistician, that we really have gained over time what I would describe as almost complete transparency on things that are procured, and when they're distributed, we have a system in place that helps them account for them.

Now, that doesn't mean we don't lose things. But we've gone through any number of audits by SIGIR

and by the General Accounting Office, and actually received pretty good marks for the systems we have in place with our Iraqi partners to maintain accountability. And -- but it -- I mean, it's an effort and one that will require emphasis, actually, particularly this year, because as we try to focus on the police you named specifically -- you know, you've heard us call this the year of the police -- well, we're really equipping them at a very aggressive rate in order to put them in a position to restore civil security by the end of the year. And so we're accelerating our equipping issues to them. And that means that along with that's got to come an acceleration of the system to account for it over time.

MR. WHITMAN: General, I'm afraid we've reached the end of our time here.

Q Can I just follow-up, please? Just very quickly.

MR. WHITMAN: We have an urgent need for a quick follow-up, according to Jim Miklaszewski.

Q General, you said a minute ago that in the former regime, some of the abusive conduct and criminal conduct by security forces was condoned. How certain are you, or confident are you that that's not going on now, that some of these activities, particularly some of the revenge killings we're seeing, are not being even tacitly condoned by the civilian Iraqi leadership?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, I mean, I can't say that I have absolute certitude because I'm not with them 24 hours a day. But I will tell you that when we -- but I spend a lot of every day with them. We also have transition teams -- we're pretty -- we are ubiquitous in Baghdad in particular. And when we find these organizations that are acting like that -- and we have found -- as you know, we found some highway patrol units that did it, we found some police that had come up from Kut that were engaged in some kidnapping. There's been five or six in the past six months where we've discovered them.

At no time -- now, you know, you can believe this or not, but at no time did that investigation run its way back to any of the senior leaders. It did run its way back to some of the intermediate leaders. And that's when I mentioned earlier about changes in leadership based on investigation. But to my satisfaction, I haven't seen any evidence that the kind of policies that you're describing are sanctioned at the ministerial level.

But if evidence surfaced that it was, we would certainly act on it.

MR. WHITMAN: General, why don't I throw it back to you to see if you have any last comments you want to make.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Just -- I think I'm almost recovered from my Duke Blue Devils being knocked out of the NCAA Tournament, so I'm back on my own personal game now. And I want to reiterate that the men and women that are doing this transition work are really doing it in a very unselfish and quiet way, which is exactly the right approach, because over time, we want to make sure that our Iraqi counterparts get credit for the things that they are doing.

And in fact, that's my last point, is that they are -- when you consider that we're only three years into this -- which is a long time; don't get me wrong, but at the same time, in the context of what they went through for the previous 35 years, it is not a very long time -- our Iraqi counterparts deserve a lot of credit for their own perseverance, and their own dedication to try to make this into something better than it was. And I'm optimistic that they're going to pull it through.

MR. WHITMAN: Well, General, thank you again for your time after which, I'm sure, has been a long day for you. This is something that -- the progress of the Iraqi security forces that we have a lot of interest in back here, and we hope that you'll join us again soon to give us another update.

GEN. DEMPSEY: I will, and you all take care of yourselves.

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