



**U.S. Department of Defense**  
Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs)

## News Transcript

On the Web:

<http://www.defenselink.mil/cgi-bin/dlprint.cgi?http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2006/tr20060616-13283.html>

Media contact: +1 (703) 697-5131

Public contact:

<http://www.dod.mil/faq/comment.html>

or +1 (703) 428-0711

---

**Presenter: Major General James Thurman**

**June 16, 2006**

---

### DoD News Briefing with Maj. Gen. Thurman from Iraq

JIM TURNER: General Thurman, this is Jim Turner in the Pentagon press office. Can you hear me?

GEN. THURMAN: Yes, Jim. Good morning.

MR. TURNER: Good morning, sir.

Today our briefer is Major General James Thurman. He is commanding general of the Multinational Division Baghdad. He assumed command in January of this year and last spoke with us in March. General Thurman leads coalition operations that include more than 61,000 U.S. and coalition troops, Iraqi army and national police.

The general is speaking to us from Baghdad. He will provide an operational update on security operations in Baghdad and the surrounding areas and then answer your questions. Please remember there is a four-second delay.

And with that, General Thurman, I'll turn it over to you.

GEN. THURMAN: Jim, thank you for that introduction. And good morning to everyone. First off, thanks for having me here today to speak with you.

We've just passed the six-month mark in theater, and we continue to focus on the security of Baghdad. This is a critical period for the Iraqi government, for our mutual commitment and support are required.

Before I take questions, I'd like to make a few comments about our current status. First, let me extend my utmost congratulations to the Iraqi people for the recent completion of the national unity government. I think Prime Minister Maliki is a man of action and has a sense of purpose. He has made some tough choices to complete his cabinet of ministries, which represents all sectarian lines. The government is now poised to take on the hard issues that are important to the Iraqi people.

The prime minister has taken on the security of Baghdad as his first priority. We are encouraged by his efforts to bring about unity, security and prosperity to the Iraqi people.

Over time, coalition forces will transition security responsibilities to the civil authorities in Baghdad, Babil

province, Karbala and Najaf provinces. This plan is on track and moving forward. The national and provincial unity will pave the way towards stability.

The prime minister has initiated a security plan to curb the violence in the city, supported by Multinational Division Baghdad.

The Iraqis have implemented a comprehensive plan which is named Operation Ma'an ila Al-Amam, "Together Forward." This endeavor consists of the implementation of emergency anti-terrorism laws, weapons control laws and combined security operations with Iraqi security forces. With precise, intelligence-driven operations, we continue to target the groups that stand in opposition to a free and prosperous Iraq.

Our combined operations with Iraqi security forces are defeating and disrupting terrorist cells and capturing high-value targets. The Iraqi army, national police and local police continue to improve the ability to synchronize and integrate the efforts to protect the people of Iraq and enforce the rule of law.

Each success brings increased trust and confidence by the Iraqi public. Multinational Division Baghdad remains focused on supporting the Iraqi security forces and taking the lead in the fight for their nation.

When we took over in January, there were three Iraqi army brigades and 12 Iraqi army battalions that held terrain in our area of responsibility. Since then, we've added five additional brigades of the Iraqi army and 11 battalions for a total of eight brigades and 23 battalions that are in the lead in battlespace today in Multinational Division Baghdad's area of operation.

The momentum continues. These Iraqi formations are independently planned and execute missions to drive down the violence and rid their nation of terrorist factions. In the Baghdad province, they operate in approximately 80 percent of the area.

Along with national security, the enforcement of civil and criminal law is also on track. Iraqi citizens are answering the call to protect and serve as Iraqi policemen. The Ministry of Interior is working hard to fully man the 262 Iraqi police stations that's in our area of operation.

Regionally, Babil, Najaf and Karbala have exceeded the coalition goal for recruiting and the appointment of policemen.

So, yeah, you can see the government has formed and is taking charge. They are courageously addressing the hard issues, especially those associated with security. We've seen a drop in violence and expect that trend to continue with the implementation of the Baghdad Security Plan. We will put more Iraqi security forces in the lead in the coming days.

In conclusion, we're openly optimistic and encouraged by the national unity government's efforts as it begins the challenging task of providing unity, security and prosperity to the Iraqi people.

With that, I will take your questions.

MR. TURNER: Okay, let's get into it.

Lolita?

Q General Thurman, it's Lolita Baldor with the Associated Press.

Can you clarify for us the number of U.S. troops that are involved in Operation Together Forward, and

give us an indication of -- some markers of success or how many either -- do you know how many people have been detained or arrests have been made?

And following that, can you say whether you have enough troops in Baghdad -- U.S. troops -- to quell some of the violence, including things like the bombing of the mosque this morning? Or will you need to bring some more forces in?

GEN. THURMAN: Let me ask your last -- or answer your last question.

First off, I believe we have enough forces inside of Baghdad and surrounding areas that we control, given the number of Iraqi security forces that we have. Particularly -- or in reference to your question with the number, we currently have 48 battalions, which are 10 coalition battalions, 13 Iraqi army battalions, and 25 national police battalions that are committed to Operation Together Forward, Operation Ma'an ila Al-Amam. Also, there's a total of over 22,000 Iraqi police that are on the streets -- that's Iraqi civil police, station police, traffic and patrol police that's allocated to this operation. But I believe right now we have enough security forces.

Q Can you say again the number of U.S. forces that are involved and whether there are any -- do you have any statistics on either how many arrests or anything that have been made?

GEN. THURMAN: As far as the number of total arrests, I don't have that with me. I can get you that information [sic--28 personnel were arrested from 10:30 June 14 to 5 pm. June 16]. I will tell you, this morning I just came back in from being over in Kadhimiya, Shula and the Shaab-Sadr City area, and this morning, as of the time I came in here, there'd only been a total -- across the 10 beladiyas inside of Baghdad -- [sic - 10 in Baghdad city and 3 in the focused beladiyas]. Of course one of them was the suicide victim IED that was detonated at the Buratha mosque. And as you know, that was -- we had an earlier bombing there in April. What was interesting about that this morning, first off, I don't know how they got in there. But secondly, there was a citizen that was inside the mosque that attempted to -- he risked his life -- that attempted to defuse the situation with the person that detonated the bomb. And he put his whole life on the line to stop it.

But I can get you the total information. But there's only been three attacks as of 17:00 inside the 10 beladiyas inside of Baghdad, and one of those was indirect fire that landed inside one of our compounds inside of Victory Vice with no effect.

MR. TURNER: Will.

Q General, Will Dunham with Reuters. For what percentage of Baghdad are Iraqi forces currently assigned security responsibilities? Is it still roughly 60 percent? And what is the projected number to be by the end of the year?

And I also just want to follow up on Lolita's question. Could you give us the number of U.S. troops and the number of Iraqi troops involved in the current operation?

GEN. THURMAN: Okay. On the number of troops right now assigned to the Multinational Division Baghdad, I've got just a little under 30,000 of U.S. coalition. Of course I have some coalition units that are assigned to us inside that. And we've got roughly 31,000 Iraqi army and Iraqi national police units that are assigned to us.

Q And the percent of --

GEN. THURMAN: The percent? Your question about -- there's 80 percent of Iraqi security forces that

are occupying battlespace in the lead inside of Baghdad, as I stated in my opening statement.

We've got the 6th Iraqi Division that's in control. He's currently in command of four Iraqi army brigades, and I have tactical control of nine national police brigades, working with them under Multinational Division Baghdad, as we work side by side in coordination.

By the end of the year, it's my hope that we will have the majority of the Iraqi army units that we have -- they will be in the lead within the next few months inside of our -- the Baghdad area of operation.

MR. TURNER: Thom?

Q General, it's Thom Shanker from The New York Times. Good morning. I'm sure that the Haditha inquiry hangs over all the senior leaders of the American military in Iraq. I'm curious what you're telling your soldiers today about your expectations of how they should they act in escalation of force incidents. And what kind of ROEs are you describing to them today?

If I could put a point on that, on one hand, of course, this nation, the military cannot tolerate the death of civilians. At the same time, it's a complicated insurgency that hangs and hides among civilians, and you don't want your troops to be too timid. So what are you telling them? And how should they move forward, balancing these two opposing needs?

GEN. THURMAN: Well, first off, the United States Army is all about values. It's all about standards. And I've been wearing this uniform for 31 years.

And I have talked to every one of our commanders that are assigned to us, and I've talked to all of the battalion-level leadership, and we renewed the emphasis just recently on what we're all about and discussed the rules of engagement again and the escalation of force. We have in fact been able to cut the escalation of force incidents in our area of operations down by over 50 percent.

We take every loss of a civilian very serious. We investigate every incident when it's reported, to make sure that we're following the rules of engagement and that we are in fact learning from any type of mistakes we may make.

But I have looked at this as a positive thing for us in terms of continuing to reemphasize the necessary training. As you correctly pointed out, this is a very complicated environment. It's complex, it's ambiguous, and it's uncertain.

And I would tell you our soldiers are performing in a superior fashion over here. And I'm on the ground quite a bit every day out with our soldiers as they patrol in a joint fashion with their Iraqi security force brothers.

Q (Off mike) -- specifically have you done, though, to cut the escalation of force incidents by 50 percent?

GEN. THURMAN: I'm sorry. Can you restate that?

Q Of course, sir. What specific actions have you and your soldiers taken that have produced this 50 percent drop in escalation of force incidents?

GEN. THURMAN: Well, one of the things that I instructed all of the soldiers assigned to Multinational Division Baghdad is to first look at our tactics, techniques and procedures.

One, I have stopped using the flash snap traffic control points, where we throw up a traffic control point in a quick fashion. I didn't think that was giving us a lot of gain, and I thought it was being more of a hindrance to the people.

I have stressed the importance of respect to people and that we are in support of the Iraqi government and Iraqi people.

That's the number one thing right there. And we have looked at our conditions in terms of how we travel, how we display certain markings on our vehicles, our speeds and that sort of business.

Every time we have an escalation of force incident and -- as a matter of fact, I look at escalation of force incidents every day -- and we discuss those. I require an after-action review by the unit leadership to go back and look at what happened, how it happened and sit down and have a hotwash on that so we can prevent that. This requires a lot of small unit leadership, and that's what this is all about -- and thinking about your actions before you act.

MR. TURNER: Tony.

Q Sir, this is Tony Capaccio with Bloomberg News.

I had a question about IEDs. Can you talk a little bit about the trend since the 4th ID has returned to the area of operation, felt an -- the insurgency's numbers of attacks and sophistication and the success of your forces in detecting and diffusing these before they go off?

GEN. THURMAN: Yes, I can.

First off, our counter-IED effort is as -- first off, is about going after the IED cells. That's the first thing.

Last month, we had 814 IEDs that were inside the Baghdad area of operation. We found about 38 percent of those. We're seeing IEDs -- right now, they are very quick to be put down. They're not -- that is our number one killer. But through the surveillance and through our tiplines and interface with people, I think we're starting to drive that in a more positive fashion. They are not as effective as they have been.

The other thing that I attribute our effectiveness to is, one, our level of training, and also the -- is our equipment. Our equipment is very good, and I want to thank the United States Army for what they've done to build to get us the equipment we need over here.

The number one thing that we see is this country was full of munitions, and the munitions have been very plentiful that we've seen on the battlefield. But that is one of our major concerns that we see every day when we are operating in the battlespace.

Q (Off mike) -- compared with, say, a year ago? Do you have any sense of comparison there?

GEN. THURMAN: Well, what I would tell you since we've been here -- we've had nearly 3,400 IEDs since we came into theater. I think there are more IEDs on the ground, but I think they're not as effective. I think one of the things that we've looked at doing is clearing all the garbage out of here, and there's a lot of trash inside of Baghdad, which makes it very easy to hide that sort of stuff. But that's one of the things that we're seeing.

But all of the Iraqi security forces, the coalition -- we're engaged on trying to, one, defeat these networks, and, two, with our counter-IED effort with our equipment, defeat these devices.

Q General, Mike Mount with CNN.

In March, about 700 troops had to be brought into Baghdad to help with security on the streets post-Samarra mosque bombing. Are you still requiring those additional troops, or do you have enough Iraqi security forces now where we might be seeing a -- for lack of a better term -- a drawdown of the additional troops that were brought in for Baghdad?

GEN. THURMAN: Well, currently -- I did ask for eight additional battalions of troops, a combination of coalition, U.S. coalition and Iraqi security forces.

I received three battalions of -- U.S. battalions, of which one of those have already been sent back, which was inside of Iraq battlespace of the area of operation. And we got five additional Iraqi battalions -- three national police and two Iraqi army battalions. And I intend on giving those two Iraqi army battalions back.

I think given the number of forces that I have right now, assuming that we keep the violence down where it is -- I'm looking at that every day and I make my recommendations to General Chiarelli and General Casey, I think we're in good shape right now.

You know, this security of Baghdad is about Iraqis. This is about the Iraqi government stepping forward and taking action to lower this violence. That's what this is about. This is not about the coalition. And I want to stress that point. I think that's very important. And since we kicked this operation off, I've been out every day, and what I've observed out there is a commitment from the Iraqi security forces on getting Baghdad in a more secure state. But right now, I think I've got enough troops to do what we need to do in here.

Q General, this is Jim Mannion from Agence France Presse. Can you say whether Shi'ite militias have been targeted in this security crackdown in Baghdad -- or in the Baghdad area or in your area of operations?

And I believe that there was an arrest just in the past couple of days, I want to say in Karbala, but I can't really remember. And I was wondering if you could fill us in on what that was all about?

GEN. THURMAN: Well, what that was all about in Karbala is that was an individual who was responsible for making IEDs and attacking coalition and Iraqi security force units, and he was violating the rule of law.

And so we went and arrested him.

We don't openly target militias. We target people that are breaking the law and operating outside the rule of law. As the prime minister stated, all Iraqi security forces will be in charge of security and not a bunch of extra armed groups or militias.

And I know that the Iraqi government is taking that problem on firsthand, and they're also taking on the weapons control. He has put out that the only people authorized to carry weapons are the Iraqi security forces, and it will not be tolerated to have illegal checkpoints, folks brandishing their weapons in public. That's no longer tolerated.

And I -- just two days ago, I was -- on the day we started this operation, I was at one of the checkpoints in Mansour, and I observed the Iraqi security forces stopping, checking cars and taking weapons.

And -- but to answer your further -- to further answer your question, we will target anybody that's

breaking the law over here.

Q General, Jeff Schogol with Stars and Stripes. When you -- following up on the question on the "call forward" brigade, did you say the troops from the 1st Armored Division, 2nd BCT, had been sent back? And if so, did you mean sent back to Kuwait or sent back elsewhere?

GEN. THURMAN: No. I still have the 2nd Battalion of the 6th Infantry with me. The 1st Brigade -- or the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, was cut back to Multinational Force West. That was in our battlespace.

Q Just a quick follow-up to the escalation of force incidents. When you say you've cut incidents in half, can you give us numbers? For example, they used to be X and now they're Y.

GEN. THURMAN: I can get those numbers to you. I don't have those right off the top of my head, but I will get you the escalation of force numbers and get those to you.

As of this morning, in all of Baghdad, there was only one escalation of force incident reported, with no injury or no damage. We -- any time that we point a weapon or we in fact have to stop a car, we will report that as a(n) escalation of force. Where we go through some form of escalation measure, that -- I require that to be reported to my headquarters. And we look at every incident. But there was only one incident this morning. So I'm pretty proud of that.

You know, we have these soldiers in a very tough environment over here. It's very complicated, and it's complex. And I think we're doing a good job of -- under the conditions of really trying to drive down the escalation of force.

Q General, to follow up on the -- Jim Miklaszewski with NBC News. To follow up on Tony's question about IEDs, you said that the IEDs were, in your words, quick to be put down. Just what are these new tactics that are being used? And what do mean by "quick to be put down"? And has that made it -- make it more difficult to detect in advance?

GEN. THURMAN: Well, we refer to those as pop-and-drop IEDs, and they're not effective. It's where they put down a -- some form of a(n) explosive very quickly, thrown out of a car. That's thrown out there, and we encounter it.

But I will tell you they have to be pretty quick, because we're going to catch them most of the time. And we've been being very effective with our efforts in here.

But I'm not going to go into exactly how they're made up and what makes them go off and all that. I do not want to do that.

Q That's somewhat similar to the sappers from Vietnam? Is that what you're talking about?

GEN. THURMAN: Well, I wouldn't compare it to sappers in Vietnam. What I would tell you is, a lot of -- you take any type of explosive round, it can quickly be thrown on the ground and -- with some form of initiator, and blown up.

And like I say, we are controlling the routes pretty well, I believe. We have freedom of maneuver here. We're in areas that we never operated in before over here. We have freedom of maneuver. And I think, you know, as I said earlier, the IED effort is about going after the cells that are responsible for operating outside the rule of law trying to bring terror and fear to the Iraqi people and trying to kill people. And that's what we're trying to stop.

MR. TURNER: We have time for one more.

Q General, Peter Spiegel at the Los Angeles Times. Answering Tom's question, you mentioned some of the steps you've taken to reduce escalation of fire incidents. Can you tell us when you started doing that, these things like stopping the flash checkpoints, and calling for the after-action reports, and sort of going back to your commanders and saying let's be careful on this? Is this something you've done in recent weeks?

GEN. THURMAN: Well, one of the things that you do in combat is you continue to train in combat. And you cannot allow bad habits to develop in combat. Bad habits get worse in combat. And it's a constant reminder of training people and going back to basic past condition and standards of what's made this army as good as it is. And I just require after-action reviews to go back and look at what happened, why it happened and how we're going to fix that and prevent that from occurring.

And the seriousness of this, it's a life or death situation most of the time for a young private, 18, 19, 20-year-old private or a 20-year-old buck sergeant. And, you know, I just want to make sure that we're providing the necessary training and the guidance that's clear to our soldiers so they understand what the rules of engagement are and know how to operate in this environment. Iraq is the toughest and most complex war that I've ever been involved in, and I've been in the Army for 31 years. And, you know, at the end of the day, our soldiers are performing very well.

Q But I mean more specifically in terms of the escalation of force incidents, when did that become a priority in your mind? Is that something that you came with when you arrived this recent time, or is this something you realized in the last month or so, where you said, okay, I got to prioritize this as something I really want to bring down?

GEN. THURMAN: Escalation of force was a priority in my mind when I left Fort Hood, Texas. When I was training as the division commander responsible for training this formation, that was factored in throughout all of our training scenarios. Now, what I would do again is I would do that a little bit different and I'd do it a little bit better because I am a little bit more experienced about what I've seen now. So that was a priority as we rolled in here. And we're continuing to work that and work -- tactics, techniques and procedures. The same with counter-IED efforts.

And like I say, you can't underestimate how tough this environment is over here. And that's the thing that I would tell you.

And I know General Chiarelli is committed to getting us the right equipment, the right packages, if you will, when we operate a checkpoint, with the right markings on vehicles, with the right signs so people can read and see what is occurring. But we're looking at, you know, our actions so we don't blind people when they're driving a car at night, and those type of common-sense things that's important for lowering the violence and injuring innocent civilians.

As I said, I take every one of those events very seriously.

MR. TURNER: As we wrap this up, General, I was wondering if you would like to make a closing remark.

GEN. THURMAN: Absolutely. I would.

You know, this is one great Army.

For the past 231 years of service, this -- the United States Army's been serving the nation. Our warriors today are performing like champions in a very complex and tough environment. They work hard every day, and they ask little in return. Each one of them is a true hero.

And I want to talk about three soldiers that I've had the opportunity to come in contact with -- your soldiers, the American people's soldiers.

Last week, I had the privilege of recognizing two of our soldiers from the 7th Squadron, 10th Cavalry assigned to the 4th Infantry Division. I presented them with Bronze Stars with V devices for valor. Sergeant Daniel Alanez (sp) and Specialist Wesley Whitehead (sp), two great infantrymen, were on patrol in their Bradley when it was hit by an IED. Sergeant Alanez (sp), although injured, took charge of the situation. He provided first aid to his wounded comrades and directed lethal fires on the enemy during the ensuing firefight until reinforcements arrived. Specialist Whitehead (sp), with complete disregard for his own safety, crawled back into his destroyed Bradley through the fumes and smoke and pulled a trapped comrade out to safety.

In another display of selfless service this week, Staff Sergeant Michael Caldwell (sp) of the 1st Squadron, 10th United States Cavalry received a terrible gunshot wound to the right forearm. Before allowing himself to be transferred to the Landstuhl Medical Center in Germany, he wanted to reenlist while his unit was still in combat. He wanted to stick with the United States Army. So we've reenlisted him in the Army while he lay wounded in a combat support hospital here in Baghdad.

That's the kind of determined people we have serving today. These are just three examples of the more 29,000 heroes in Multinational Division Baghdad. At the end of the day, it's all about soldiers on point for the nation, and I believe that they're getting the job done. And America can be proud of these men and women who have answered the call to duty.

Finally, I'd just like to thank the American people and ask them for their continued support over here. God bless all of you and God bless the United States of America.

Thank you very much.

MR. TURNER: Thank you, General Thurman.

(C) COPYRIGHT 2005, FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC., 1000 VERMONT AVE. NW; 5TH FLOOR; WASHINGTON, DC - 20005, USA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. ANY REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION IS EXPRESSLY PROHIBITED.

UNAUTHORIZED REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION CONSTITUTES A MISAPPROPRIATION UNDER APPLICABLE UNFAIR COMPETITION LAW, AND FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC. RESERVES THE RIGHT TO PURSUE ALL REMEDIES AVAILABLE TO IT IN RESPECT TO SUCH MISAPPROPRIATION.

FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC. IS A PRIVATE FIRM AND IS NOT AFFILIATED WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. NO COPYRIGHT IS CLAIMED AS TO ANY PART OF THE ORIGINAL WORK PREPARED BY A UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT OFFICER OR EMPLOYEE AS PART OF THAT PERSON'S OFFICIAL DUTIES.

FOR INFORMATION ON SUBSCRIBING TO FNS, PLEASE CALL JACK GRAEME AT 202-347-1400.

<http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2006/tr20060616-13283.html>