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On-the-Record Briefing on Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Iraq

David M. Satterfield, Senior Advisor to the Secretary and Coordinator for Iraq

Via Teleconference

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(4:10 p.m. EST)

DEPUTY SPOKESMAN CASEY: Good afternoon, everyone. Sorry we took a couple of minutes to get us started here. We want to give you all an opportunity to hear from David Satterfield today. As you know, there's been a lot of discussion about the State Department's efforts in Iraq, including our efforts to both work with our existing PRTs as well as expand the program and create new ones. The Secretary, of course, addressed this earlier today in her testimony, but we wanted to give David an opportunity to talk to you a little bit more and fill you in on a few more details about the program.

David, let me turn it over to you.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Thanks, Tom. Let me give you all a little bit of a background, a little bit of context on where we are on the PRT process itself and then some specifics on how State and DOD have been working together on meeting the urgent staffing needs for the PRTs.

We're in the process of doubling the number of our Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq from 10 to 20 and the number of personnel from about 290 to slightly over 600. And these expanded PRTs -- that is, expanding the base of the existing PRTs, adding the ten new ones -- are designed very much as a hand-in-glove effort with the military to advance our strategic objectives in Iraq, accelerate transition to Iraqi self-reliance. The basic goals of the PRTs are going to be a diversified, a decentralized approach, although we will have six PRTs in Baghdad itself to support efforts there; to bolster moderates; to advance reconciliation and democratization aims; very much to support our counterinsurgency strategy, particularly the build part, the stabilization part of clear, secure build; to foster economic development and to build provincial capacity for governance.

This is going to be an important tool, an augmented tool in our hands, for strengthening moderates against extremists, those who are working in a political process versus those engaged in violence. Now, the PRTs already include, and

these new PRTs certainly will include, civilian and military personnel working side by side. This is about as joint a mission as is possible. In some cases they're going to be living in tents, they're going to be working in brigade combat team facilities. They're very much going to be a co-effort.

Now, the staff for these augmented PRTs are needed urgently. State Department is providing leadership for the teams. Agency for International Development is going to be providing key development officers. We have those individuals identified. They are in train right now.

But we went out to our brigade commanders, we went to our existing PRT team leaders weeks ago, and we asked them from the bottom up to construct a staffing model for Washington of what each brigade commander's area of responsibility, each joint PRT military area of responsibility would require. What kind of specialist did you need? Did you need agricultural technicians? Do you need town planners? Do you need rule of law specialists? Do you need veterinarians? What is it you need? No cookie-cutter approach, no one-size-fits-all.

They reflected. They came back to us with staffing requirements. Those requirements in the short term, and by short term we're talking about what's needed to get out on the ground over the next 60 days as we set up PRTs in the conflict areas, North Babel, Anbar Province, augmenting our Baghdad Province. They need 129 civilian technical staffers. That is external to the staff that we're going to be providing from State and AID.

The people that make up this specialist list -- the business development, agribusiness, medical, city management -- these are the kinds of areas they need to come from. We in the State Department, the Foreign Service, indeed AID's professional corps, don't have these kinds of skill sets. They're not part of what we do. In fact, in many cases they're not part of what civilian cabinet agencies of governance have in their full-time hires. They're going to come ultimately from the contractor field. But we can't wait to bring on these people after we have funding available to do it, and the funding to bring these augmented PRT staffers on board is contained in the FY07 supplemental request, which the Secretary of State and the Secretary of the Defense have spoken to to the Congress this week.

Those funds may not be available till late summer or early fall. We need these people now. And so the only vehicle to get the right people out with the right skill sets today in the right time frame was to use military reservists. Those are individuals who in their civilian lives have these kinds of skills and they can be mobilized and brought into service very, very quickly. So starting in December, with the strong support of Chairman Pace, the J3 and J5, their teams, we have worked intensively with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, with the Joint Chiefs, to identify the exact numbers, the skill sets required, mechanisms for bringing them on board. We have had outstanding cooperation and support from the Department of Defense in this.

But this is an interim measure. It is a transitional measure. We will need these surges until we have the funding available in our hands to bring on the contractor staff who will be filling these jobs and more beyond that 129 number, because there is another tranche of some 140-plus that will follow them, but we have to have the funds in hand to do this.

In the meantime, while the reservists are staffing these positions, we will be working aggressively here at State to arrange the recruitment through the contracting mechanisms available to us so that when the monies flow from the Hill, we will be able to send those reservists home, put our contractors out in the field.

What's the timeframe for that? We've asked for these reservists to be prepared for nine to 12 months. I'd like to tell you

the goal here is six months, to get them in and get them out. But the real deadline is going to be when the Hill passes on our supplemental request and when those monies are available to us. As soon as that happens, we will have the contractors in hand, the reservists will come back.

This is something which Secretary Rice and Secretary Gates have spoken to. They are both very supportive of this joint effort. This is going to move ahead and I think it's going to move ahead in a fashion that will serve our interests extremely well.

Those are my points.

DEPUTY SPOKESMAN CASEY: Okay. Thank you, David. Let's go ahead now and move over to some questions.

OPERATOR: Thank you. At this time, if anyone does have a question, please press *1 on your touchtone phone. All questions will be taken in the order they are received. To withdraw your question, you may press *2. Once again, to ask a question, please press *1 on your touchtone phone.

Karen DeYoung, your line is open.

QUESTION: Yes, hello. My question is, doesn't it undercut the effort if you're having people go into these very foreign situations, very difficult situations with the expectation, the hope, even, that they'll be leaving within six months?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Karen, we have a short-term need to get people out there immediately. The individuals we will be tapping, because they come from a military background, are well-equipped to serve in these kinds of situations. And I would remind you, military does surges of all different kinds, civil-mil, all around the world. It is not just in Iraq.

We believe these folks have the ability to serve and to serve effectively. Obviously, we would love to have the permanent staffers in our hands right now. It's not an issue of inability to recruit; it's we do not have the funds to do this with. This is, we believe, a suitable bridging process to get people who can do the job out there and then bring out folks who, for a longer period of time, will be able to take up those tasks.

Now we're not just throwing people blindly into these jobs, military or civilian contractors, when they flow on board. We are revising training programs so that teams going out to the new PRTs will have an opportunity to train together, to work together here in Washington before they head out to the field. So this is something we've thought through very carefully. We believe this can work based on the experience of moving these kinds of teams, particularly the military specialists, in the past.

QUESTION: Can I follow up on that?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Sure.

QUESTION: Could you -- are these voluntary or are these reservists that are going to be called up to do this? And how

long does the training last?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Karen, on both of those questions, I'm going to have to take the point for you.

QUESTION: Okay.

(Pause.)

QUESTION: Hello?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Yes. Are you still on, Karen?

QUESTION: Yeah, I'm still on. Are there any questions?

OPERATOR: Oh, I wasn't sure if you were done.

QUESTION: Okay, I guess I'm done, yes.

OPERATOR: Barbara Slavin, your line is open.

QUESTION: Thanks. Thanks, David. Are you going to be robbing Peter to pay Paul here? I mean, where are these people going to come from, given that the reserves are already so stressed? How are, you know, you going to find these people? And also if you could just explain how -- what they're going to do is different from, say, what the current PRTs are doing? You've given us a long list of goals, but what specific sorts of things are you looking for? And will they be kind of a reward to local leaders if in return for cooperation on security, say, will a certain neighborhood in Baghdad or a certain area in Anbar get -- you know, get a certain group of specialists?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Barbara to take your questions in order, no, this is not robbing Peter to pay Paul. The military has the ability to take this small number of reservists -- 129 is what we are looking at -- hook them in for this period of we hope close to six months, be prepared for a slightly longer period -- perhaps nine -- without damaging our ability to move on military requirements in Iraq, Afghanistan or elsewhere. That's first point.

Second point, how will the new PRTs differ or how will the expanded PRTs, because we are going to be augmenting staff of existing PRTs, be different? There is going to be a very strong focus, Barbara, on stabilization efforts, post-kinetic build. Obviously because the bulk of this surge is going to take place in Baghdad and Anbar provinces secondarily in Salaheddin and Diyala.

The focus there is on making that build part, phase three, a clear secure and build as meaningful as possible and that is a focus which PRTs in Hillah, in Basra, in Dhi Qar, in Irbil have not has a primary requirement. But like all PRTs, they are also going to be focusing on advancing support for moderates, good governance practices, civil society. But on this surge this first phase of PRTs it's very much a stabilization build focus. With these other tasks still there, they're not stripped off, but they are secondary to the stabilization role that is going to be played.

QUESTION: If I could just follow, when you say build and stabilize, are you talking about projects like clearing the garbage, are you talking about some of these, you know, sort of short-term employment projects that we've heard about or something more?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: It's many different things. Obviously in the immediate aftermath of clearing a conflict area, of securing that area from bad elements coming in and then disrupting again, you want to put young men who have been either engaged in violence or who are targets for solicitation to join organizations engaged in violence to work. You want to employ them. And so we certainly are going to be engaging in short term activities. But short term is just that -- short-term. They have got to morph into longer term genuine economic opportunities. That's what real build is. Make-work is very important and I don't diminish here or in other conflict and immediate post conflict areas around the world the significance of immediate employment. But you've got to translate that immediate employment, the make-work projects, into longer term lasting jobs and that is very much a focus of our efforts and the work we are doing along with Iraqis as well because that's an element, too, that should not be ignored. We are working closely with Iraqi authorities to mobilize their resources, their money, their programs for the longer term aspects of build.

QUESTION: Okay. Thanks.

OPERATOR: Sue Fleming, your line is open.

QUESTION: The PRTs have been around for more than a year and they've never been fully staffed. What's the problem with recruitment? Is it just the people at State don't want to go to a war zone?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: I don't know what you're speaking about -- a problem with recruitment. This is a myth which the Secretary and I are both happy to debunk. The PRTs are essentially fully staffed as is the embassy. We have had very little difficulty in recruiting staff for the PRTs.

QUESTION: But initially, you did have problems with the PRTs. They weren't fully staffed for quite a long period of time.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: PRTs only began in late summer-early fall of 2005 as Provincial Reconstruction Development Councils. The PRDCs translated in late fall of 2005 into PRTs. We progressively along with our coalition partners built -- opened new PRTs on a rolling basis throughout 2006. Indeed, we have just now opened the last of the original set of PRTs in Irbil. Obviously there was a lag as we were setting up in rapid pace these new entities, but the story here doesn't exist; they're fully staffed.

QUESTION: Thanks.

OPERATOR: Elise Labott, your line is open.

(Pause.)

OPERATOR: Elise Labott, your line is open.

QUESTION: Can you hear me now?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Yes.

QUESTION: Okay, thanks. David, could you talk a little bit more about the working with the Iraqis and what this means when you say kind of diversify the central approach? I mean, there was -- we had a briefing a couple of weeks back and there was a lot of talk about decentralization and what that means to you in terms of working with the Iraqis. And just a little bit about how this Iraq -- the Iraq PRTs -- they do seem to differ from what we've traditionally known from the kind of PRTs in Afghanistan, which were these small teams that went in and worked on reconstruction. But this whole idea of working with the government on this decentralization seems a little bit different this time.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Okay, first question. We are working closely, obviously, on stabilizing Baghdad, on bringing down sectarian violence on Baghdad. The Iraqi Government is committed to and indeed must demonstrate that in its treatment of violence in that city, where 80 to 85 percent of all violence in Iraq takes place, that they are acting in a competent, effective and national vice sectarian basis. That's going to have an enormous reinforcing translation across the country. It will have repercussions positively for Iraq in terms of mobilizing external support, particularly from Iraq's Arab neighbors in the Gulf. Baghdad is a critical focal point.

However, there is an Iraq outside of Baghdad and there are 20 million-plus Iraqis who live outside of Baghdad, and their needs, their stories are different in many cases from the extreme violence, disruption of life experienced in the capital city. We want to see help given to moderates, to those interested in advancing good governance, economic prosperity outside the city of 6 million as well. That's what diversify and decentralize means. We are putting a huge amount of assets, both economic and civilian-military, into Baghdad itself, six new PRTs paired with our brigade combat teams in Baghdad. That's an extraordinary commitment. You know of the military surge commitment to Baghdad in terms of force levels, but there is an Iraq outside as well and we want to work on that Iraq where there are successes, many of them, where the situation can indeed, may already be largely stabilized and real progress is possible at a different accelerated pace. It is not ignoring Baghdad, but it's not ignoring the rest of the country as well.

Now, your last question. The Iraqi PRTs are fundamentally different from the Afghan PRTs. They share little in common except the name PRT. They had been different since their inception in late summer/fall of 2005. They are much larger. Their scope of operations are much greater than was the case, is the case, in Afghanistan. The civilian component to those teams is much more significant than is the military-led PRTs in Afghanistan. They really are apples and oranges.

OPERATOR: Were you ready for the next question?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Yes.

OPERATOR: Thank you. Michelle Kelleman, your line is open.

QUESTION: Yes, thanks. I'm -- first of all, if I could ask just how many Foreign Service officers are out there already and how many total once you expand this. And what exactly are they doing? I mean, how do you go about supporting moderates or supporting local NGOs if you're there with a bunch of military guys?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: We have got 140-plus FSOs at our Embassy in Baghdad. We have over 50 Foreign Service officers serving in our PRTs. We have an additional large cadre of AID officers serving, of course, in Baghdad and in the field. We will be bringing in, I believe, an additional 19 Foreign Service officers to staff the new PRTs at a leadership level as well as a number of AID officers in each of the PRTs.

Your second question though, "bunch of military officers," implies how could one possibly advance civil society, good governance, democratization or civilian stabilization with "a bunch of military officers." Well, the bunch of military officers who are seeing now and have seen service in Iraq by the thousands are specialists themselves in civil-military affairs. They have done an absolutely extraordinary job of working at the lowest of grass levels throughout that country in build, in stabilization, in trying to build a basis for a democratic society. They are our colleagues in every sense of the word in this undertaking and it is a privilege to be able to work with them.

QUESTION: Can I ask also a broader question of staffing? One, it seems that you have a lot of people at the embassy in these PRTs. They're also quick turnover. I mean, it's usually after a year. Isn't that putting stress on the Foreign Service officers?

And then secondly, the President talks about this civilian corps, reserve corps.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Yes.

QUESTION: The State Department has been talking about this for a couple of years. Is there money this year in the budget that is going to make this a reality? Because it's been talked about for so long.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: The first question about one year service -- look, whether it's Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, any post where you really want to achieve continuity, you'd love to have folks there for two or even three years, that's the way we assign our chiefs of mission. The fact is, however, the nature of service, the physical nature as well as the demands of service in places like Iraq, Baghdad and especially the PRTs, Afghanistan, is such that we believe the stresses on our service, like the stresses on the military, for beyond one-year tours of duty -- and I would remind you that the U.S. military serve tours ranging from 120 days, I believe in the case of the Air Force, through seven months in the case of the Marine Corps, to one year in the case of the Army, are also limited as a way of relieving this stress.

Does it place demands on the Foreign Service? Does it place demands on the Army, on the Marine Corps? Of course it does. But they're demands which we believe we remain capable of meeting for the foreseeable future.

Your comment about the civilian response corps. We very much want to see the civilian response corps -- the civilian reserve corps as it's sometimes referred to -- move ahead. The Secretary and the President are very much committed to this, as are the other cabinet agencies. This is something which is still in its nascent stage. And on the issue of funding for the corps, we have proposed a concept now which we will be coming to the Congress for support and for funding. But I do not have a number for you.

QUESTION: Okay, thanks.

OPERATOR: Our next question comes from Jonathan Beale. Your line is open.

QUESTION: Yeah, hi. I just wanted to clarify the number of reservists that are going to join the PRTs -- 129 I think it was you said -- have they already been informed? And also on a sort of practical point, will they wear military uniforms? Will they be armed? Or will they to all intents and purpose look like civilians on the ground?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Jonathan, on both of those questions I will refer you to the Department of Defense. However, I can tell you that right now the civil-military teams -- and remember, it's not as if what we are proposing is something that we are not doing right now today throughout Iraq. We have ten fully functional Provincial Reconstruction Teams which are joint military-U.S. civilian operations in all but three of those operations. It's already working. It's something we know is a functional model. We are expanding that model. We're not starting something we've never done before. And the military in most cases there, I do believe wear their uniforms. But you can get those details from DOD.

QUESTION: Can I just follow up on one other issue, which is obviously there isn't an awful lot known about what exactly these PRT teams do. Whether that's our fault or your fault, I don't know. But when they're being trained, is there any chance of getting some media access to see what -- you know, how these guys are going to work on the ground?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Jonathan, we'll take the question. But the fact is without shifting blame onto our always active press, we have been touting the work of the PRTs for a year and a half now. We have had media visits to PRTs. We have taken folks around to Baghdad, to the Provincial Teams outside the city. Baghdad would be more than happy to provide any details possible about the role of the missions, accomplishments, staffing models of the PRTs.

QUESTION: Okay, thanks.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Sure.

DEPUTY SPOKESMAN CASEY: Guys, I think we've got time for a couple more here, so let's go for a couple and then try and wrap it up.

OPERATOR: Okay, our next question comes from Farah Stockman. Your line is open.

QUESTION: Hi, thanks. There seems to be a lot of mixed messages about the level of contact these PRTs can have with the local population. We've heard Rice and yourself talk about the success at working with people in Anbar, but in October the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction released a report that said only four out of 13 teams said they were generally able to fulfill their mission and in Anbar, the team said it was not able -- generally unable to fulfill its mission and that it was basically interacting with local people through email and telephone because it was too dangerous.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Wrong. Look, that's not correct. The situation today, the situation as it has been for many months in Anbar is a sterling example of this, is quite effective contact. Our Anbar team, in fact, has been one of the most active in reaching out to tribal elements, to local authorities, and has had enormous success given the magnitude of the security difficulties and challenges posed by the insurgency and al-Qaida in that province. You're citing survey statistics from months and months back. It does not reflect the reality of the PRT world or activities today.

QUESTION: It was released in October, but you're saying that --

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: It does not reflect the reality of PRT work today.

QUESTION: Okay. And could I follow up? What -- you're saying that right now, there are 290 people in PRTs and is -- and 150 of them are Foreign Service officers?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: No, 100 -- we have approximately 140 Foreign Service officers in the mission in Baghdad. We have about another 50-plus officers at our PRTs.

QUESTION: Okay. And then that's going to expand to 600 people total and how many of those will be foreign -- how many of those --

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: I'll go back over what I said --

QUESTION: It will be an additional 15 --

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: No, let me go back over before -- the skill sets needed for the additional 350 or so staff who will be coming in are not skill sets which any foreign service in the world, including our own, possessed. They're veterinarians, they're soil specialists, they're agricultural development specialists, they're town planners, they're city managers.

These people are going to need to come ultimately out of an expert contractor base. The Foreign Service will be providing the leadership for the PRTs. The Agency for International Development will be providing program lead officers. But the vast majority of the expanded staff, like the majority of the staff today, will come from a very specialized civilian cadre after the initial military reservist surge. And basically, you're bringing in civilians there who happen to be mobilizable through their military reserve service. But you're tapping their civilian skills more than their military skills.

QUESTION: Thank you.

DEPUTY SPOKESMAN CASEY: Okay, guys. I think in the interest of time and in the interest of David's schedule, I think we're going to make this the last question here. So let's go ahead with one more.

OPERATOR: Okay. Our last question comes from Yochi Dreazen. Your line is open.

QUESTION: Thanks. Hi, David. Two questions if I could; one that's a logistical one, one that's a conceptual one. The logistical one: the PRTs -- the expanded PRTs, are they going to have their own force protection elements, their own vehicles, et cetera? Or will they be collocated with and dependent on the military?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: They will be collocated -- the expanded PRTs will be collocated with and will be dependent upon military movement teams. It is the only practical way in which to get this civil-military synergy out there

in combat areas.

QUESTION: Got it. So they won't be bringing their own --

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: No.

QUESTION: -- bodyguards the way other State Department personnel in Iraq do?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: No, no.

QUESTION: And then just the conceptual one, obviously, the IRF money, the kind of large-scale Halliburton, Parsons, Bechtel, that phase of reconstruction is over?

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Yep.

QUESTION: Is this meant to supplant that? Is it meant to --

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: It very much is. And your question speaks to a very fundamental theme. The era of big construction, indeed, of reconstruction with a capital R conducted by multinational or large U.S. design build firms is over. The remaining IRF funds were spent through. They're all committed. They were actually spent through during the remainder of calendar '07 and the first weeks or months of calendar '08. We are out and getting out of that business. The transition is to Iraqi self-sufficiency and self-reliance.

We're going to be working on projects that help bridge on issues like budget execution capacity. So Iraq is capable of spending its money, not our spending ours. It's getting Iraqis able to function at local governance levels as well as central governance levels in meeting basic needs and extending basic services. Its capacity from the standpoint not of our doing work for the Iraqis, but moving them to the ability to provide that work, those services for themselves and you should very much view this as a move away from capital R reconstruction -- getting out of that -- to stabilization post-conflict in the troubled areas to capacity development at a national level as well as at a local level focusing on a few major lines of operation like budget execution.

QUESTION: Got you. And that will depend I assume on getting the Iraqi Government to spend more of its capital budget which --

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Absolutely.

QUESTION: -- it so far has not done.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Absolutely.

QUESTION: But how do you get them to do it when they haven't done that --

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Because you do it by working with them in two different lines of operation. The first are the mechanisms for budget execution. Look, the Iraqis have got capital budgets for critical ministries like oil. They had \$3.5 billion in the '06 budget for the Oil Ministry. They spent under 10 percent of that, not for security reasons, not for political reasons, but because they literally did not know how to construct a capital investment budget and move it. Saddam's 30 years plus of rule did not exactly provide a model for capital infrastructure investment. The oil industry of Iraq today is an oil industry frozen around 1968 when the last major investments were placed in. So this is starting from zero. But it's got to move at a very fast pace and it's why we're putting so much emphasis on the mechanisms of budget execution. That's one line of operation.

The other major line of operation is reinforcing with the Iraqis something the President has done, Secretary Gates, Secretary Rice have done, and will continue to do which is you must be in the lead. You are responsible for your country. You've got to move essential services. You've got to move a political process. You've got to come to the table on security. Now, we have heard the right things. But Iraqis are going to have to move on this and we have a very close dialogue not just with the Prime Minister, but with a broader political leadership of Iraq with key financial managers like Deputy Prime Minister Barham Saleh who are working to translate promises of budget support into the reality of budget support while we work with them on the technical mechanisms to move funds out.

QUESTION: Thank you.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Mm-hmm.

DEPUTY SPOKESMAN CASEY: Everyone, thank you very much. We appreciate you joining us today. Thank you again, David, for making the time to do this.

AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD: Thank you all.

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