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Special Briefing

Office of the Spokesman

Via Satellite from Ramadi, Anbar Province, Iraq and Baghdad, Iraq

October 15, 2007

Briefing on Reconstruction Progress in Iraq

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Fallujah Team Leader Stephen Fakan and Colonel Richard L. Simcock, II, Commander 6th Regimental Combat Team; And Baghdad Team Leader Eric Whitaker and Colonel Jeffrey L. Bannister, Commander 2nd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division

(10:30 a.m. EDT)

MR. GALLEGOS: Good morning, you all. I appreciate you coming. This morning for our first segment we have Mr. Stephen Fakan, the team leader for PRT Anbar, part of the 6th Regional Combat Team. And we also have Colonel Richard L. Simcock of the United States Marines. He's a Commander of the 6th Regimental Combat Team. And they're going to be discussing reconstruction progress in Iraq and the current activities that are taking place in their provinces. I appreciate the help of our techs getting this up and running. I think the two of them will make a brief statement. We'll go to questions and answers. I'll ask that you all give your names and your affiliations when the questioning begins.

Gentlemen.

COL SIMCOCK: Well, good afternoon. Again, I'm Colonel Rich Simcock. I'm the Commanding Officer of Regional Combat Team 6 and it's a pleasure to talk with you today. My opening comments will obviously deal a lot with the improvement here in Area of Operation Raleigh from a security aspect. We've been experiencing a lot of success here and I think it's attributable to four main reasons.

The first reason is we're the fourth iteration of Regimental Combat Teams to come through AO Raleigh. That's important and significant in that we are currently conducting counterinsurgency operations. In order to be successful, it requires a

great deal of time and engagement with the local people in order to reap the benefits. The three (inaudible) that were here before us did tremendous work and we've been able to build on that.

The second reason, I think we've had a lot of success and that has to do with the surge of forces -- the Baghdad security plan. On average, I've had one infantry battalion more than my predecessors have had. That's allowed me to go into places that they could not and probably more importantly it's allowed me to stay from a permanent basis in those areas. It's allowed me to break the whack-o-mole routine, if you will, of going from one problem and then having to pull out and go somewhere else.

The third reason has been the great cooperation and efforts of the Iraqi security forces. By Iraqi security forces I'm talking about the Iraqi Army, the Iraqi police, the provisional security forces and the neighborhood watches that have provided tremendous security and working hand in hand with coalition forces have led to great success here in AO Raleigh.

The last recent, and then probably the most important, has been the ability for us to conduct tribal engagement with the local tribes around Fallujah. The four major tribes around Fallujah -- we've been able to have the leaders of those tribes come back. A lot of them had fled Iraq because of murder intimidation from al-Qaeda. They fled to Syria and Jordan. We've been successful in getting them to come back because the security situation allowed that and that has been a tremendous benefit for us.

Those four reasons, I think, have greatly -- have added to our success from a security aspect. Steve's going to talk to you now about the areas where -- since he's joined us since April, to build on that first building block of security and take the success that we're having here to greater extents.

MR. FAKAN: Good afternoon, everybody. My name's Stephen Fakan and I'm the team leader of the embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team with RCT-6. And my team has been here on the ground since April and since April we've grown to about 14 team members. It's a joint civilian military team. We have representatives -- the Department of State, USAID, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and then the rest of the team is formed of active duty and reserve U. S. military personnel, ranging in rank from O6 to the O2 level. They also bring to our space a great amount of subject matter expertise. We have people on the team who in their real jobs work in the public health sector, work in city or city planning, industry, small business development, small business management, banking (inaudible). And all of these things we bring together to work in conjunction with RTC-6 to help stand the Iraqis back up after this little (inaudible) we've had in the past where we didn't know or they didn't know what direction they wanted to go.

Our mission here, of course, is to work with the moderates, bolster them, stand up the governance, work with economic development, rule of law, build on the security that has been provided by the RCT-6. We also work in conjunction -- very closely with the Civil Affairs Group here. And one of the things that we do is coordinate our efforts so that when we -- working in an area of the battle space, one thing builds off the other. You either -- we're building on something that the CAG had started or the CAG is building on something that we have started. We're finding it works very well. We work with the battle space commanders. Each of the battalion commanders has a battle space (inaudible) and down to the company commander level and various parts of the area.

One of the big things that's happened since we arrived is the fact that the municipal governments are starting to stand up. The city of Fallujah now has a city council, it has a mayor, it has a city council chairman that are all very responsive to the needs of their constituency. They are working very hard and working very much together to try to solve some of

the essential problems that are being confronted by these folks today.

As the battle spaces become more permissive, in other words the security environment has improved, we're getting the municipal districts, the outlying sub-districts are starting to stand up their own city councils, so we've got Gharma coming on line, (inaudible) coming on line, (inaudible), all of these people are starting to come together and work as a unit to fix their particular area. Some of the projects that we're enabling them to do -- we work in conjunction with them -- we're going to reclaim 16,000 acres of farmland. One of the biggest employee markets here, if you will, is farming. Some of the canals and things were damaged in the fighting. Some areas of farmland were unusable because it had been untended and unused for a while. We're going to reclaim all that. We're working with some of the state-owned enterprises to try to employ more people. We have a metal fabrication plant that is capable of reverse engineering just about any part you can bring to them. This was a military unit that built basically mobile artillery pieces for the Hussein regime and after the war it converted themselves to civilian capacity. They have the capacity to employ about 4,000 people. The brick refractory is another state-owned enterprise. Small businesses are starting to come to the fore.

You know, economic development, the backbone of economic development, the Fallujah area is going to be the small businesses that employ 10, 20, 30 people. We're working very hard with them to revitalize that economy. We're going to do that through small business grants, small business loans. The chamber of commerce here has been revitalized. They are very active and working with the city council to try to come up with methods by which they can energize the economy.

I don't want to talk too much because I realize there are a lot of questions out there and Colonel Simcock may have other things he wants to add based on what I've said. So I think I'll stop it there and if there are any questions or if the Colonel would like to add something I'll pass it over to him.

COL SIMCOCK: I don't have anything more to add. I think we'd best serve you guys by answering any questions that you all have at this time.

MR. GALLEGOS: Gentlemen, thank you. We'll start with Sue Pleming of Reuters.

QUESTION: Yeah, hi. You said that the municipal government is being stood up. Maybe if you could just explain how often do they meet, give examples of exactly what they're doing. Is it a good sort of ethnic mix within the government or is it fairly lopsided? Maybe if you could just provide a few concrete details to illustrate how they've been stood up, as you said.

MR. FAKAN: Sure. The city council in Fallujah is actually right now operating as a district council as well because it's a seat of Fallujah government. They meet about once a week formally, and then informally they meet throughout the week to discuss various city issues.

We also have a weekly meeting with what we call the directors general. These would equate to city engineers of the basic essential services such as water, power, sewer, to discuss problems. They have been fixing those various things.

Things we're working on typically could revolve around moving people through our entry control points, moving goods and services through those things. How freight gets moved from one side of the city to the other, it could have to do with water mains broken somewhere, it needs to be repaired. It could be electrical grid -- a wire's been knocked down,

you know, either by a truck or through some reconstruction process, how do we get the engineers out there to fix that. They are responding to all those needs and the same thing is occurring in the sub-districts, they're starting to meet and citizens are coming to the city council meetings and identifying problems, when its school supplies for the schools, clinics -- supplies for the clinics, water, potable water for maybe the hospital. Any of those sorts of things are all active topics at any time in one of these city council meetings.

QUESTION: And what about the ethnic mix?

MR. FAKAN: As you're probably aware, the Sunni -- Anbar Province is very predominantly Sunni in its makeup. I'm very pleased to report, however, that in two areas of our battle space, we actually have Shia families moving back into their homes. And one community in particular we were very interested to hear that their Sunni neighbors, when the Shia families fled, actually boarded up the houses and protected them and the goods inside until the families returned. And I'm very pleased to say in one community about 30 to 40 percent of the Shia families have now returned to their original dwellings.

QUESTION: But I take it the council is just about -- any Sunni?

MR. FAKAN: That would be a fair assumption, but it's a mix of the tribal culture. It's a mix of the professional -- professional capacity such as lawyers, doctors, educators and it's a mixture of civil service.

MR. GALLEGOS: Okay. Next we have Zain Verjee with CNN.

QUESTION: Thank you. Could you give us a sense of what some of the biggest challenges that you've had -- have been on the ground and how specifically you've overcome them? And what are some of the issues that you're struggling with right now and trying to find solutions for?

COL SIMCOCK: Well, I'll take the first shot at that and let Steve follow up. I mean, our first challenge when we got here back in January was obviously establishing security. That was the number one task at hand. It took us a while to have some progress. I think we've reached a very significant tipping point, if you will, around the 4th of July, a significant event obviously for the U.S. but also over here in AO Raleigh. The security situation, a complete turnaround for the main reasons I think that I gave you earlier and that has been that the building block that has allowed the people to come out and participate in governance that Steve just talked about. But probably more importantly it allows them to come out and do the things that a lot of the citizens here in Al Anbar have not been able to do because of murder intimidation that al-Qaeda was doing. And we have made great strides in regards to that and we're very, very pleased with the progress that we're making.

MR. FAKAN: I would have to say one of the most difficult things that we've had to deal with is we basically turned their government system topsy-turvy. You know, normally this stuff was, you know, building plans -- you know, the farmers' crops, all of that stuff was pushed down from Baghdad, down to the province, down to the districts. Right now, we're trying to build a system where all this information is pushed from the ground up. And to get the folks who are involved in this process -- and there are some motivated, very intelligent, very excited folks about this process -- to get them used to making a decision without worrying about whether someone's going to like it or not or whether they're going to get in trouble for it or not was a big step for us. It took a little while to get them used to that concept that they actually had

some control over what it is that they're doing and where they're going to take their cities and where they're going to take the district. And I'm very pleased to say that they've jumped onto that bandwagon and are working very hard together to come up with Iraqi solutions basically for Iraqi problems.

MR. GALLEGOS: Middle East, NBC is next.

QUESTION: Hi, thank you for the briefing. How much longer do you think U.S. troops will need to remain in your area at the current levels that they are? At what point do you think you might be able to turn over control to the Iraqi security forces?

COL SIMCOCK: I'll answer the second part of your question. We're doing it already. We are turning over to the Iraqi security forces and have been, I think in earnest, as I said about the 4th of July was a big tipping point for us.

The first part of your question, I really can't answer that. I'm not going to put a timeline on it. We're having tremendous success. The Iraqi security forces are getting bigger and are gaining in capabilities. We see nothing but progress from them and we continue to go the right direction.

QUESTION: Would you say -- you know, for the next -- you think you'll need to be there for the next year so as not to erase any of the progress that you've made?

MR. FAKAN: I think we'll be here as long as it takes for us to be successful in our mission.

MR. GALLEGOS: Okay, we have about four minutes. Yes, Samir.

QUESTION: In general do you have like a deadline for PRTs in Al Anbar? Like for example, how long -- or when do you decide you accomplished the work of the PRT and you move to another city or area?

MR. FAKAN: Oh, I think I'd have to answer that question the same way Colonel Simcock answered the question about how long troops would remain in Anbar. I think we'll be here as long as it takes. And you know, we have the (inaudible) PRT working with provincial government and the three PRTS working throughout the province and we're all coordinating our efforts. So it will be as long as it takes.

MR. GALLEGOS: Back to Libby with NBC.

QUESTION: You mentioned al-Qaeda briefly -- this is for Colonel Simcock -- can you just give us your assessment of how -- of the strength of al-Qaeda right now and your efforts to diminish their influence?

COL SIMCOCK: I think I can say confidently that al-Qaeda is defeated in AO Raleigh. I go back again to the 4th of July where they were unable to conduct any type of concerted efforts to prevent us from doing the things that we want to do within AO Raleigh. There are still attacks in Fallujah and surrounding areas. We have not killed or captured every single al-Qaeda member that's here. But their capabilities are greatly diminished. I would characterize them as a defeated force from my perspective.

MR. GALLEGOS: And Sue with Reuters.

QUESTION: Has the -- who provides security for you when you go out to meet various officials? Are you -- do you have security from private contractors? And has the problem with Blackwater impacted your work?

MR. FAKAN: Oh, no. We rely on the RCT to provide security for us. We have a dedicated security team that we coordinate with on a daily and weekly basis to move us around the battle space where we need to go. There are no private contractors here.

MR. GALLEGOS: Okay. Thank you, Sue. Okay, gentlemen, at this point I want to thank you all for participating in this program. Unfortunately, we're going to have to move on towards Baghdad. But I appreciate it. Best of luck and continue your good work.

Thank you.

MR. FAKAN: Thank you.

COL SIMCOCK: Thank you.

* * *

MR. GALLEGOS: Thank you for your patience. We appreciate the efforts of our techs in getting this up and running. It's time for us to start the second half of our program. From Baghdad we have Mr. Eric Whitaker, the Team Leader PRT Baghdad; and we have Colonel Jeffrey Lynn Bannister, Commander of the 2nd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division.

Gentlemen, I'll give you a chance to make some brief comments and then we'll move to questions and answers.

MR. WHITAKER: Okay, thank you. Good morning. My name is Eric Whitaker. I'm a Foreign Services Officer with the Department of State. I'm the Team Leader for the Embedded PRT based to Forward Operating Base Loyalty with Colonel Bannister, our brigade commander. The embedded PRT, of course, is a provincial reconstruction team which is integrated within a military unit and based in the community offering services at the local level rather than at the provincial level.

Our team has eight members. They include myself from the State Department, our Deputy Team Leader is from USAID. We have a civil affairs officer. We have four specialists: an industry specialist, a governance specialist, a city planner, and a business and finance specialist. We also have a bicultural/bilingual adviser who's an Iraqi national who's also on our team helping us with cultural and translation matters. I transferred to this assignment from Khartoum, Sudan, where I was previously based as the political economic counselor of the embassy.

Our team arrived six months ago. We live and work on the east side of Baghdad with responsibility for the districts of 9 Nissan, Rusafa and Karadah. The EPRTs developed following President Bush's commitment this past January to double the number of PRTs, which at the time were ten. Today there are about 28 in number, scattered throughout Iraq at

the provincial and the local levels. The EPRTs offer diplomacy and development to complement defense, sort of making a three-sided triangle to fully integrate these facets of U.S. national strength.

Together with the civil-military operations component of our brigade, we formed a joint common plan which guides our activities. It consists of 90-day windows where we look at short-term objectives and mutually undertake activities or tactics to pursue those objectives. Each of these objectives has its own task group, consisting of members of the EPRT and members of the brigade.

Some of our key areas that we're pursuing are strengthening local governance and this includes training activities, coaching and mentoring neighborhood and district councils, working to improve the district council halls, and to provide training opportunities for the members as well as helping them to strengthen intergovernmental relations both horizontally and vertically (inaudible) of Iraq.

Our second main program area is supporting economic growth and development. This includes grants and loans, work in the sectors of agriculture, commerce and industry. We also work to restore basic public services and infrastructure within the community. This includes sewer, water, electricity, academics, trash removal, fuel and health.

The fourth and final area is fostering reconciliation at the community level. In this area we talk with a broad spectrum of stakeholders in the community, whether they are Sunni, Shia, Christian or other groups, to try to help develop Iraq's civil society and help restore the cultural fabric which has been torn by the conflict.

USAID has provided considerable resources to our work with over \$3.3 million in small business grants. They have a community stabilization program which offers employment opportunities and they also offer a business skills development training course wherein hundreds have been able to benefit and start their own businesses gainfully employed.

We also have resources through the Quick Response Fund, the QRF, which enable us to undertake community reconciliation activities, neighborhood trash removal programs, provide humanitarian assistance packages and introduce medical supplies to the communities so we can diagnose local shortages and address them directly.

All in all, the work that we're doing is designed to be a counterinsurgency effort which seeks to improve life at the level of the Iraqi family.

Thank you.

COL BANNISTER: Good morning, I'm Colonel Jeff Banister, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division. I think you are familiar with this brigade. It was stationed in Korea for the last 50 years and then, you know, it got sent to Iraq and then it came back to Fort Carson in CONUS. And we've been stationed there for one year and then it made its historical journey back to Iraq one year later.

The brigade assumed battle space on 16 November 06 and that was without the Embedded PRT which we got in April. Headquarters is, as Eric said, at FOB Operating Base Loyalty. We've got eight battalions. We have six that own battle space and we have two support. We are responsible for three of the Baghdad security districts, as Eric said. These are districts of predominantly Shia, account for 2 million of the 8 million Iraqis in Baghdad.

East Baghdad received two of the U.S. surge brigades during, you know, the change of strategy and it reduced our battle space by over two-thirds. As part of this strategy change to the current environment, we were also fortunate enough to receive three coalition force surge battalions and we also gained an additional Iraqi Army brigade. So you can tell it really put more boots on the ground as it narrowed our sector down by two-thirds.

Seventy-five percent of these soldiers to include our Iraqi partners are forward deployed and up in 20 joint security stations in our combat outposts and those are supported by our two forward operating bases at Loyalty and Rustamiyah. We have a total of three Iraqi security brigades; two are army and one are national police. And we also have three Iraqi police districts of over 5600 IPs and that is growing.

On the threat -- the predominant threat in East Baghdad's Shia population has been the vehicle-borne IED in the marketplaces. The greatest threat to coalition forces and our Iraqi partners has been the Iranian-supported Shia extremists with the EFPs -- that's the IED that -- explosive foreign projectile is what that stands for. And now we're starting to see a few RPG-29s and, of course, indirect fire against our bases.

Our brigade sits in the most lethal area for the EFP bombings and it accounts for 26 percent of the IEDs that we receive on the east side. And unfortunately, that kills 56 percent of our soldiers. And just so you can kind of measure the difference, only 2 percent of all the IEDs in the rest of Iraq are EFPs, so we kind of live in a pretty lethal zone for that system.

I will tell you, though, that since -- the attacks from these Shia extremist groups -- since Muqtada al-Sadr's 29 August degree, has been down. The overall attacks for August were -- they reduced from August from 256 down to 153 in September, so that's pretty significant. And for October up to this point we've only had 36 attacks and that's good.

I will tell you that, you know, we have been substantially reducing these threats through our lethal targeting efforts. And for the vehicle-borne IED, we've actually hardened 13 markets, marketplaces, and this includes the recent reopening of the revitalized Abu Nawas Street and the (inaudible) book market in the intellectual zone. We've also hardened a lot of the Iraqi checkpoints, about 45 to date, and this has helped to improve their force protection.

As far as the EPRT, Eric has given you a good rundown. But I will tell you that it is a valuable force multiplier that brings in a tremendous capability to us because we just don't have that organic to the brigade. They reside and integrate with the brigade and they're here to help us and they're here to help the Iraqis build capacity at the local governance level. And they've definitely helped us with the diplomacy side on gaining access to some of the local governance security areas, and in particular 9 Nissan.

I'll tell you one of the most immediate impacts to the environment has been geared toward repairing the city's infrastructure and stimulating the local business. And we'll be prepared for Q&A on that, but we've done quite a bit of leveraging of our own funds into this area as the Iraqi Government grows capacity to spend their own oil revenues and they're starting to do that.

On the reconciliation, I'll tell you that we communicated with both the Sunni and the Shia and it's -- it's always interesting because we have one Sunni enclave and we've got a couple Sunni mahalas. But I will tell you that our efforts are starting to pay off and we've just had six Iftars that had very mixed and blended Iraqis into the mosque, and that was

a very good success and everyone appreciated it. And on the Iraq security volunteer program to recruit local residents, it was a little different on the east side because we have to, you know, continue to work through this -- you know, the threads on the militia. But I will tell you that the only AQI that we see, we see a little bit in our Sunni enclaves, but we mostly get them when they're in the VBIDS and then that's when -- because the Shia are the targets in the marketplaces. So we don't have the AQI that is in the west in Anbar or west Baghdad and we have a substantial greater degree of Iraqi police and police stations, and so it's a little bit different. But we are hiring volunteers to fill the gap of Iraqi police and it's about 900 for the first year, so it's a lot less, you know, in numbers than it is on the west side.

I think we're ready for some Q&A.

MR. GALLEGOS: Okay. Sue.

QUESTION: Sue Pleming from Reuters. As you mentioned, you're living in a -- or you're working out of a very lethal zone. How frequently are you able to get out and see the people that you need to see? And in terms of reconciliation, do you think the people with whom you're working are really committed to reconciliation?

MR. WHITAKER: The members of our EPRT get out an average of three or four times a week each. I've been out as many as six times in a single week. We go, of course, in convoys. The brigade provides us security. So we go out in humvees or other vehicles that provide us with full security.

We're able to nonetheless work and structure our activities so we're able to see the various people in the neighborhood or district levels that we want to meet with. So even though it is a constraint, we've nonetheless been able and willing to go out into the community.

I think that the people that we meet with are dedicated to reconciliation. The problem is we are meeting with a limited spectrum of Iraqi society because, of course, many tend to stay at home or are very concerned about the security environment. We're meeting with people in local government. We're meeting with business leaders. We're meeting with leaders of civil society. But let's also keep in mind that there's a large technocratic class from Iraq that has left the country. They're in Syria, they're in Jordan, they're in other countries. And trying to convince people the conditions have changed and it's time for them to come home and that they have an important role to play in rebuilding Iraqi society, that's something that's quite important.

QUESTION: Would you say then that the number of people who have left the country -- and it's in huge droves -- has really impacted how you can do your job? And until they start coming back, do you think it's going to be difficult for you to meet your goals?

MR. WHITAKER: I think it's important that they return because many of the technocrats of the past government -- of course, Saddam Hussein was Sunni and many of the people in his government were of that ethnic background and many of them did flee or were persecuted during the years following the fall of Saddam Hussein.

In the meanwhile, we're doing training with local government officials, training with the business skills development program and others to try to help rebuild an entrepreneurial culture and trying to rebuild a technocratic structure within the government. So we're doing the best we can with people that are there, but it is a fact that some of the key people

that had led to Iraq's development in the past are not present currently.

COL BANNISTER: Just to highlight a couple things on that. We're already seeing a few signs. We've reopened -- I think it's nine Sunni mosques, and that's always a good sign. And then the Abu Nuas, there's quite a few of the businesses that are down there that have called in because they own the business and they want -- you know, they're getting an assessment of the security situation so they can come back and reopen their business. And you know, the reconciliation effort has allowed that.

MR. WHITAKER: There were a couple of these business owners who have indeed returned from Damascus, and our people talked with them.

MODERATOR: Other questions?

COL BANNISTER: Next question.

MR. GALLEGOS: Could you all talk about -- when we were talking to the Provincial PRT, they were discussing their interaction with the provincial government. Could you all explain who you're interacting with and how they're affecting the change that you're looking at?

MR. WHITAKER: Okay. The levels of government that we're interacting with are at the neighborhood and district level. The provincial PRTs, of course, talk to the equivalent of city hall, the provincial council and the higher levels of government. We are within a district, 9 Nissan, with responsibility for three political districts. Each week we attend each of the district council meetings. We attend some of their essential services meetings and put together other meetings in the community; for example, there's a biweekly agricultural meeting, plus a series of reconciliation meetings that we engage in.

The district council meetings that we attend typically have from 20 to 40 members that represent each of the neighborhoods within the district. For example, in 9 Nissan, I'll be going to the district council meeting tomorrow morning at 10:30, typically a one-and-a-half to two-hour meeting, with representatives, some 30 to 40 members, representing the ten neighborhoods within the 9 Nissan district. They'll come and they'll bring in the questions and concerns of their constituents, they'll represent their interests in a broader forum and they'll talk about a number of issues as they move through an agenda.

The various neighborhoods will each have a brief report to make and each of the ten working committees, such as education, essential services, or health committee, will each offer an update at these meetings as well. They make decisions and they vote on issues at the table. They also offer us an opportunity, if we wish to speak or make a presentation. For example, we've got a brochure that would help them to show to their constituents what neighborhood councils and district councils were all about, how they represented their interests. So we had this publication in Arabic put together to help them to explain to their constituents who they were and what they did and how to make use of them as conduits for policy at the local level. So we're primarily focused at the district council level, but it's by no means the extent of our interlocutors in the community.

COL BANNISTER: Just a couple things on that. You know, the first quarter we came in here and we focused, you

know, very, very much so on the neighborhoods, you know, the mahalas and at the district level. And another thing the EPRT brought to us was the access in order to even be able to communicate with them and set up the standard meeting so we can correspond with them, you know, to help them. And so that was last quarter. In this quarter we have good participation and the neighborhood council leaders for the local governments there. I mean, like I said, he said ten and just one security district. Last week there were nine of the ten there. I mean, that's a huge step. We only had a couple when we first started meeting with them. So the access is there. We've helped them through a lot of quick impact projects and so they see our intentions are good. And these are areas that are very close to Sadr City that have not had security forces inside there except for militias for the past couple of years. So now we have full access.

So this quarter what we're focused on, one of our objectives is to get the provincial government officials down into the security district to help -- so they can actually see what the Iraqi population needs. And so we're already having success. They're bringing them into our meetings and letting them see for themselves. And they can't say, hey, it's not secure anymore because the surge has brought the security. So now it's about getting access from the provincial council down, getting them into the meeting so they can take care and grow their own capacity so we have a self-reliant Iraq and not relying upon, you know, coalition forces and the things that we bring.

Now, the final part to that is the Iraqi security force commanders at the brigade level, you know, they're participating even in the essential service meetings. So now they're talking projects and so they -- we have built their relationships very strong with the local leaders that they secure, because after all it takes Iraqi security forces and us to make sure the contractors get in to do the work. So that part is going well.

So as you can see, it's progressing along very methodically. But sometimes it may not be quick enough, but it is getting there. And this whole linkage of capacity from the provincial down to the district is -- like I said, it's one of our big objectives this quarter.

MR. WHITAKER: Another area where we add to the process is when we work with the different levels of government. When I say we're working with the neighborhood and district councils, those are in a vertical chain below the provincial council as advisory or legislative bodies. There's also the parallel city hall arm of government, the executive branch. We're trying to link the two up. So we've been effective in getting the, in effect, the public works department representative to show up at the district council meetings, particularly at the essential services meetings. So much of what we do is intergovernmental relations. It's getting the representative from a various committee or from the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Health to come to a meeting to plan education or health activities. It's getting the public works people to the correct meetings so that when there is a water or sewer project to be repaired or extended, that we have the right people at the right meetings. Because in the past, they were operating fairly independently. We've started to bring them together and add synergy to the governmental processes.

MR. GALLEGOS: Thank you, gentlemen. We have about three more minutes. Time for one more question.

QUESTION: Yes. It's Michel Ghandour with Al Hurra television. As PRTs, what are you doing to fight corruption in Baghdad and especially in the government?

MR. WHITAKER: I think our efforts in corruption -- and of course, we're not alone. We also coordinate with the Baghdad PRT, which operates above us at the provincial level. We're one of six EPRTs within the city of Baghdad. We've divided up the various districts. Within our districts, anticorruption efforts would include our participation, advising

and mentoring in the district council and other meetings. It's involved in the governance training program. It's involved in other activities, resources that we supply to the district council members in other aspects of our programming that talks about accountability and transparency. So these are fundamental principals which underline all of our work. So we're doing it in ways that are direct and indirect both, but it is supplemented at the provincial level as well.

Frankly, our government levels have minimal resources. For the most part, corruption is not one of the key issues. They don't have their own budgets, for example -- they're advisory bodies -- so we've been fortunate that that's not one of our highest concerns. It is systemically, but perhaps it's more importantly dealt with at the Baghdad PRT level.

COL BANNISTER: I can tell you on the -- you know, from a security standpoint, the things that we're doing that will -- that definitely help the population is -- because there's a lot of black marketing going on that supports the -- you know, the bankroll of the militias. And so we've actually hardened some gas stations and we've put security forces at those gas stations to prevent the intimidation of bribes from the people so they don't wait in the gas line and get bribed to get money bribed out of them through intimidation. So we've really cut the gas lines back from like four hours down in a couple of our stations they went from the worst in Baghdad to the best to a 15-minute wait. And now we're looking at propane retail places where the propane goes out before it gets sent out to do the same sort of things and we've put overwatch on it so we don't have, you know, intimidation going on that supports the black market.

So that's kind of what we see at our level. And as Eric said, they don't really have a budge yet, so it's kind of tough for them to have anything to -- that entices them into doing, you know, bad things, so --

MR. GALLEGOS: Gentlemen, at this point, I want to thank you for your time. Appreciate your work and I wish you both the best.

MR. WHITAKER: Thank you very much. You're most welcome

COL BANNISTER: Thank you very much.

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