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Central Command and the Global War on Terrorism

Lieutenant General Lance Smith, Deputy Commanding General, U.S. Central Command

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COL MACHAMER: Well, good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the Washington Foreign Press Center. We're very pleased to have with us today Lieutenant General Lance Smith, who is the Deputy Commanding General for Central Command, and he's here with us today to provide you an update on Central Command and the global war on terrorism. And as most of you are aware, Central Command's very responsibility stretches from the Horn of Africa all the way to Central Asia.

And with that, General Smith.

LTGEN SMITH: Thank you. I'll have a very brief opening statement and I will then be glad to take questions from you. Good morning, and thank you for having me here with you. I'm pleased and honored to be here.

I'd like to start by offering my condolences to all of those families, both Iraqi and coalition members, who have lost loved ones in the recent operations. Now I appreciate the opportunity to discuss ongoing efforts throughout our entire area of responsibility. I will talk briefly about Iraq and Afghanistan but I'll rely on your questions to do that.



But in our area of operations, the overall responsibility, we focused on the entire global war on terror. It is 27 countries, from Sudan to Kazakhstan and Iraq and Afghanistan just happen to be two of the countries within our region, and you can look at the whole area and see that it has some very volatile and some very important countries, like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, Syria, Lebanon, as well as the ones that you read so much about all the time. And we spend a great deal of our time engaging with the leadership of those nations, both in efforts to ensure greater cooperation between nations, as well as to solicit their support and cooperation as we fight the global war on terror.

We are very pleased with recent events in Fallujah. The Iraqi security forces have fought well. The coalition forces, in coordination, in conjunction, and in support of the Iraqi Government have done an admirable job of quickly securing the city. That is not to say that all fighting has ended. There are still pockets of resistance, primarily in the southern industrial part where we have a number of people that apparently are prepared to suicidally continue their efforts. We have them blocked and encircled the city, but it looks like they will fight to the death.

We're not sure exactly who they are. We suspect that they are probably foreign fighters. Many of them are in there using explosive vests, prepared to take their own lives with members of the Iraqi security forces and coalition forces as they come closer and closer to apprehension. But we are slowly working ourselves through those parts of the city and we will rid the city of them in a very short period of time.

In other parts of the city, humanitarian assistance is occurring both through the military forces, Iraqi security forces and other humanitarian organizations. We have not let many organizations into the city yet because of the security situation and so we will continue to search and clear until we find it stable enough to allow others in there. And we are going to continue to go after the insurgents and make sure that they do not get another safe haven so that we can move towards a more stable and secure Iraq in preparation for the elections in January.

The situation in Afghanistan, we are cautiously optimistic about. I think the very successful elections in Afghanistan have been very understated by the press and the media. I mean, this has been a spectacular success there that I don't think is fully recognized. You all will remember a year ago or a year and a half ago talking about elections in Afghanistan. The cynics were every place: it couldn't happen, the warlords weren't going to allow it to happen, the massive amount of munitions that the warlords had were going to make it impossible. But this has been an unbelievable success, with almost nine million people voting, 40 percent of which were women, and could not have happened or even been conceived of several years ago.

And so we look forward to the elections in Iraq in January, and we look forward to the local elections of the upper and lower house in Afghanistan in the spring, and we will continue to support both governments as we move in that direction.

That's a brief summary of what's going on, at least in those two parts of the world, and I'll be happy to take questions about anything else that you might have regarding our area of operation.

COL MACHAMER: And as a reminder, as you ask your questions, please wait for the microphone and identify yourself by name and news organization. Thank you.

QUESTION: Dmitri (Inaudible), *Financial Times*.

Can you give us an idea as to the breakdown of the number of foreign fighters and indigenous Iraqis in the insurgency? And how much success are you having stopping people coming over the border into Iraq to fight?

LTGEN SMITH: On the first question, we don't have a good handle on that. I can tell you we have taken over 1,000 detainees. A small number of those are foreign fighters, I would say in the category of a dozen to maybe two dozen, but as you know, it is very difficult to determine what a foreign fighter is. They do not carry ID cards or passports as they're in there doing this fighting. So it takes an Iraqi or another Arab to be able to tell by accent and stuff where they're from, where they might be from, and that is an ongoing process, as we go and interview the detainees. And it is going to be more difficult as we look at those that were killed to try and determine whether or not they were foreign fighters.

We do, as I mentioned, believe it is not a particular Iraqi trait to commit suicide in a jihad like this, and so it is pure conjecture that many of these that may be planning on fighting to the end are foreign fighters that have come to fight jihad in Iraq. But again, there's a lot of work to be done yet to really determine the percentage or just exactly the size of the foreign fighter forces in there.

QUESTION: Coming across the border?

LTGEN SMITH: Coming across the border, we -- as you know, we sealed off the border for the early days of Fallujah to prevent folks coming through the accepted movement. All along, we have believed that most of the foreign fighters that come into Iraq from other areas come across legally, with forged papers and the like. Others, of course, use the smuggling routes and when they use the smuggling routes we can try and get at them. We have much more cooperation with Syria than we have in the past. We have not met as much success as we would like with the recent events because there is more yet to do, but recent meetings with Syria have gained support from them on their side of the border to help with that.

The numbers, I've seen them bounced around the same way you have, from 1,000 have come across the border to hundreds, and I don't have an answer. I think it would be very difficult for us to tell. But again, my own belief is that many come across legally and then go to safe houses and then go forward. So that also is difficult to get our arms around.

QUESTION: Giampiero Gramaglia, Italian News Agency ANSA.

General, two clarifications, basic clarifications, and a question. The clarifications: How many American troops it's correct to think there are today in Iraq? And I understood was that less than two percent of the prisoners you took are surely foreigners. Those are the clarifications.

LTGEN SMITH: You bet. In Iraq there are between 135,000 and 140,000 troops, and as you know, those numbers change as we have overlapped between forces and troops come in and troops go out, very dynamic number.

And I've seen those percentages. Some have said five percent, less than five percent, less than ten percent, less than two percent. I just don't know. I mean, we don't know. We make projections that as many as a thousand could be foreign fighters. We think many of the foreign fighters left in the early days. Remember, in Fallujah this was a very, very much-advertised campaign. This was not really about taking out leadership and stuff. It was really focused on taking back the terrain and taking away the safe haven from the terrorists we know they used. And everything we expected to find in Fallujah we have found, by the way, from the torture factories to the IED bomb-making facilities to hostage areas. So we have taken that away from them and that was our goal. So in advertising, we do believe that there were a number of insurgents and probably some of the foreign fighters that decided they were going to go someplace else to fight.

QUESTION: And do you share the idea that it will be more difficult to keep Fallujah free than it was to take Fallujah?

LTGEN SMITH: That's always a difficult -- the most difficult part is, as you know, is to do exactly that -- is to have the committed police force, which I think has to be the front line of providing law and order in the city, to being able to have the Iraqi National Guard or other Iraqi security forces that can back them up with larger weaponry and to have coalition forces that can also assist where we're needed.

The decisive operation piece of this, which is coming to an end as we transition into stability operations, will occur for the next several weeks, and that will be designed to start cleaning up the city and to start moving into a phase where we have several hundred million or a couple of hundred million dollars that are already earmarked for rebuilding and reconstruction within the city. And much like the old Sadr City or Thawra, part of Baghdad, we expect to put a great deal of people, a great number of people, to work during that reconstruction phase. I think in Thawra, I think we've got about 14,500 people that we put back to work, and we think that is the key to stabilizing Fallujah and keeping it from going back in the hands of the insurgents.

QUESTION: T.V. Parasuram, Press Trust of India.

Does the performance of the Iraqi troops in this Fallujah operation give you confidence that next year sometime it will be possible to withdraw the American troops?

LTGEN SMITH: Absolutely. And I wouldn't -- you know, that is a -- that can be a trick question. Clearly, our goal and our

plan is to build the Iraqi security forces sufficiently, train sufficiently experienced, sufficiently equipped and with the self-confidence that we can start to withdraw our forces as they build their forces up. And indeed, there was some disappointment last April in the performance of some of the troops, and the way they performed in Fallujah clearly shows that there are a core of fighters in the Iraqi security forces that are prepared and capable of operating independently and in war-fighting operations that does give us confidence that our efforts to train the Iraqi security force can be successful.

They will be the core of the future Iraqi army, and as you know, all of those units that are fighting, it is about 60 to 75 percent that are core folks that are out there fighting, and we have got to reach the point where 100 percent of those units are experienced and capable of performing the mission that they'll be asked to perform by the Iraqi Government.

But yes, we believe that what we saw in Fallujah gives us great confidence that we will be able to transition to an Iraq that is fully capable of taking care of its internal security, as well as its external. How long, is really the question, how long it will take.

QUESTION: My name is (inaudible), from *Al Arabi*, the magazine.

This is almost a follow-up. You know, a couple of months ago, there was a lot of talk in the Arab world about Arab or Muslim forces, you know, joining or disengaging or whatever. What happened to all these talks, and have been discussed in the State Department or other places, what happened to these efforts?

LTGEN SMITH: Are you talking about the Saudi effort? That is ongoing. It has not come to fruition as rapidly as we had hoped, but they -- Saudi Arabia is still engaged, as are we with Saudi, to put together some kind of Muslim force that is prepared to engage. There is a no-neighbor policy. I'm not sure that it has been articulated quite as strongly in Iraq as it has been in Afghanistan, but you'll recall in Afghanistan that President Karzai said that he did not want forces from neighboring countries in his country.

And so that precludes, you know, some of those from helping in Iraq that might otherwise wish to help. But we are still in the process of talking and hoping to develop a Muslim force that would be able to help support the Interim Iraqi Government.

QUESTION: Reha Atasagan with the Turkish Public Television.

General Lance, can you tell us what is the position with the PKK terrorists in northern Iraq and what kind of cooperation you're having with the Turkish side? As you know, the PKK is crossing to the Turkish side and they are committing terrorist acts over there.

LTGEN SMITH: We are clearly aware of the PKK situation. We are sharing intelligence as we get it and we are clearly supporting the Iraqi Government as they have stated that, I believe, it is a terrorist organization and they're not going to support it. And so we will support the -- Prime Minister Allawi and government as they work to try and make sure that they get the PKK under control.

I think the PUK and the KDP, likewise, would like them to leave; and so there is support in those communities as well. And so we will continue to work with the Interim Iraqi Government to expel them from the country.

QUESTION: Expel them where?

LTGEN SMITH: That's always a good question, isn't it? Because they -- the borders -- they've been crossing back and forth across those borders, smuggling and doing other things for a long, long time. And so it, you know, as we move up in the direction -- it is also, they've integrated themselves into society, so it's very difficult for us to tell who is PKK and who is not, as it is difficult for the Turkish forces that are up in the region to tell. And when we move against them, they move into other parts of the world or of the area that gives them some level of sanctuary.

So it's a difficult task and to dig them out and engage that fight, I think, will take a considerable amount of forces and we need to do that at the right time.

QUESTION: My name is Katja Gloger, I'm from Germany's *Stern* magazine.

General, would you comment on the shooting and killing on -- of the Iraqi wounded fighter in Fallujah the other day?

LTGEN SMITH: Certainly.

QUESTION: Do you know more about what really happened?

LTGEN SMITH: We don't know more. As you know, as soon as an event like this occurs, we immediately withdraw those involved from the battlefield and immediately begin conducting an investigation. And so that's what we're in the process of doing right now. Given that this just occurred a couple of days ago, it will be some period of time before all of the soldiers that were witnesses to this have been interviewed. The soldier himself has an opportunity to say what happened and then judgments will be made unto whether or not he violated any of the rules of engagement or any of the laws of war.

So that is -- I will not be able to give you much information until that investigation is concluded, other than to tell you that we take this every bit as seriously as the Iraqis do, as you do, as anybody else does, and that we will investigate it fully and we will make sure that it -- you know, that our justice system does the right thing.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

LTGEN SMITH: You know, I just saw that for the first time in the press today that there was anything beyond the one that was in there. So I don't have any more information than the folks have there. I mean, my understanding is -- I saw the same video that was provided, that it was one, but we know there were dead in the mosque and we know there were some wounded that were left in the mosque behind. So, you know, I only know about the shooting incident directly and that will have to come out of the investigation that follows on.

QUESTION: Dmitry Kirsanov, Russian News Agency, TASS.

General, it's my -- I assume you have some kind of either ad hoc or permanent cooperation, I mean, the U.S. Central Command with Russian military forces, either in Central Asia or elsewhere. Could you please tell about this in some detail, if you can?

And I also wonder if you have -- basically, what do you think about plans to withdraw Russian border guards from Tajikistan, whether you think it's going --

LTGEN SMITH: Central Command does not have a formal and direct relationship with Russia where we go visit Russia or they come visit us and discuss these sorts of issues, but clearly we interact because of Tajikistan and some of the other parts -- Kazakhstan. I was just -- just happened to be there last week. I was in Tajikistan, I think, on Wednesday and Kazakhstan on Tuesday and we did discuss the border issue with some level of concern on the part of the Tajiks and their ability to replace the same capability on the borders that the Russian troops have been able to provide.

But Russia has been very cooperative with them and will provide a lot of the resources and assets and training, as will we, to try and help them with their border security. And for a lot of reasons: Tajikistan is rightfully concerned about the movement of terrorist groups like, you know, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan forces that travel across the border, but equally concerned about the movement of drugs from Afghanistan or other areas through Tajikistan on their way into Russia; and I know Russia is concerned about that as well.

So I think between the Russian Government and the American Government, we have the same goal, and that's to ensure that Tajikistan is able to control its borders, and we will cooperate and work together to make that happen.

QUESTION: Jyri Raivio, *Helsingin Sanomat*, Finland.

Tom Friedman writes in today's *New York Times* that it's quite clear that more U.S. troops are needed in Iraq. Would you comment that? And a small thing about Fallujah. Does anybody have any idea of the civilian victims of this fight in Fallujah?

LTGEN SMITH: You'll have to repeat the last part here in a minute, but let me answer the first part on the number of troops. We go through an evaluation of our troop strength and troop levels over there on a regular basis, and as you know, the threat that we determine that is out there determines what level of troop strength we need, that we believe we need to have.

We have projected and so stated for a period of time that we expect an increased level of violence between the establishment of the Interim Iraqi Government and election. And so this level of violence, while high, was not unexpected. So we have structured our forces to be able to accommodate that, and as we move closer to elections, we will make adjustments to our troop strength to ensure that we will have the forces to be able to back up the Iraqi security force in sufficient numbers.

Now, I will admit that we had hoped that the Iraqi security forces might come along faster, as far as capability and ability to conduct the law enforcement mission, as well as the local control mission. And for a lot of reasons, a lot of it had to do with equipment and late in getting them equipment and the limited amount of training that they get, but also in experiencing the force so that you do have folks that are prepared and capable of fighting at the battalion and above level. So as they build that capability, we will adjust our forces accordingly.

So we don't think that there is a need for a huge increase in the size of forces. We do think there is a requirement for experienced forces to be in place in the run-up to the election if we're going to ensure that there's sufficient stability and security to conduct the elections.

And now the second part of it?

QUESTION: Yes, the second question was about the civilian casualties in Fallujah, now that the major combat operations seem to be over.

LTGEN SMITH: Oh, civilian casualties in Fallujah. We've been into every place, but there is much left yet to find in Fallujah. But we believe that most of the civilians left Fallujah in larger numbers than we originally predicted. Those that remained behind we think are limited in numbers. And we probably have a good idea of how many there are because they are coming out to the humanitarian assistance centers, the railroads station and the hospitals and some of the other places where we're passing out food and water or where the Iraqi security forces are passing out food and water.

So we do not think that there were many civilians in there and we have been very careful throughout this entire engagement, and it was part of the going in proposition that one of our major concerns was to ensure that we minimize civilian casualties. And I can only say this, at the initial blush, to the best of my ability, if there were civilian casualties that they will be very minor.

Now, that is not to say that we won't find something out different tomorrow when somebody goes into a house that perhaps was blown up. But I can tell you that with the close air support, with the heavy machinery, or the heavy weapons, we were very, very careful to avoid civilian casualties.

QUESTION: Thank you. Leila Benradja, Algeria News Agency.

So what is the level of cooperation between United States and Algeria in the fighting against terrorists in North Africa, and especially in the country of Sahel, like Mali, Niger, where al-Qaida seeks to take base?

LTGEN SMITH: I just don't know. Algeria is not in our area of operations, and so our cooperation is really through European command when we deal with Algeria. So I'm not -- we obviously have shared concerns, especially as people from Northern Africa and stuff move into our region to fight. But we have not see a lot of that occur from Algeria; and then I defer to the European command folks on that relationship.

QUESTION: Joel Tibbet, from Al-Hurra TV.

Last week, the leader of the Lebanese militia, Hezbollah, said that he has, his militia has missiles and planes who can hit the center of Israel. How is the CENTCOM dealing with this kind of facts?

LTGEN SMITH: You have identified one of the seams between European Command and Central Command in that Israel and Palestine are in European Command area of operations and Lebanon is in ours.

Our interest in dealing with Lebanon and our efforts with Lebanon and Syria are to try and support the withdrawal of Syrian forces from that area and to try to engage so that Hezbollah and other organizations that I think we just recently had some rockets that Hezbollah took credit for launching from Lebanon into Israel in the last few days, I believe, that that stops. And to do that, we are working and coordinating with Syria and the Government of Lebanon.

We don't have any magic wand at this stage. We are only initiating our relationships with those two countries and we expect that to increase. But we, obviously, have great concern about the rockets and the efforts of Hezbollah in the area.

We have had considerably increased cooperation, by the way. I mean, we are talking, which is one of the things that we weren't doing a lot of before. So I think there is hope for us to help in the Palestinian-Israeli situation through Syria and Lebanon.

QUESTION: My name is H. Wada. I'm with *Mainichi Shimbun* newspaper.

This question may be out of your area of responsibility, but let me ask you about the preparation for elections in Iraq. I think now voter registration is underway down there and I wonder if you could update us on that and other preparations. And could you also say how confident you are about the possibility of the elections to be held throughout Iraq in January.

Thanks.

LTGEN SMITH: You bet. Clearly, we are working to try and ensure that there is sufficient stability to be able to conduct elections in January. We have not backed away from that date, and I don't think you will see the United States Government have a position other than we believe that the elections should occur in January.

If the Allawi Government or others, you know, consider that, that will be up to them. The Iraqi Election Commission will have to have a voice in that and whether or not they think that they can have successful elections. But that will be something that they will deal with. But my understanding right now is everybody is moving towards a January election date with some skeptics out there. But you will recall in Afghanistan, they indeed did move it to the right a little bit, but the skeptics said that it would never occur when it occurred. And it occurred with very limited violence.

What happened in Afghanistan is the people decided that they were going to have successful elections because they wanted successful elections. And that was first recognized during the registration process. We were hoping for about 6 million registered voters in Afghanistan and we ultimately got 10.5 million, which said something about their desire to have successful elections.

We have now passed out the ballots to every province of Iraq except Ramadi. We hope that we will get them to Ramadi as soon as the aftermath of Fallujah gets resolved and there is sufficient stability there to get the ballots or the registration -- I said ballots but I meant registration materials. And we are finding that not unlike the Afghan people, the Iraqi people very much support elections.

You know, I can't give you a number, but, I mean, there is clearly a very small minority. They are mostly former regime elements that do not see any future in a free and democratic Iraq, that want to retain former Baathist rule because that's their power base, and they will continue to try and disrupt those elections to make sure that they don't occur because they believe that they will not be running Iraq and that they still have a right or should run Iraq, and they're not going to. So they will continue to try and disrupt, but as long as the Iraqi people want it, and we believe they do, in vast, vast majority, then the registration will continue to occur.

The bigger problem for us right now is how you do out-of-country voting. We think we can do the in-country voting because of the Oil-for-Food records that we have, although it's difficult to tell how many people are registered because the way we're doing this is your name, if you are Oil-for-Food, goes on a list, and if the information on there is accurate, you don't have to do anything; you only really go to the registration people if there is something in error and change that, address or whatever.

So it's going to be difficult for us to really realize how many people have actively registered but we find a great deal of interest in this, a great deal of learning and education going on in the villages, and so we think that is all very positive.

QUESTION: Imke Oltmanns, from the German Public Television ZDF.

I'd like to leave Iraq for a moment. And I wonder if you can tell us to what extent the U.S. military is involved in the search for Usama bin Laden and his associates and what more can you tell us about that.

LTGEN SMITH: We have never stopped looking for Usama bin Laden. Usama bin Laden and Zawahiri and the other leadership of the al-Qaida group have been our number one targets for a long, long time, and our forces have been positioned from the very beginning of Enduring

Freedom, have been positioned on the Afghan side of the Afghan-Pakistan border geared to and focused on Usama bin Laden and Zawahiri. With the very, very positive moves over the last three to six months by the Pakistan military in the federally administered tribal areas.

In western Pakistan, we have seen very positive events where the al-Qaida leadership is being forced on the move. They have killed or captured a great number of the leadership. The al-Qaida senior leadership continues to run. They are living in the remotest areas of the world without any -- other than courier -- without any communications with the outside world or their people and unable to orchestrate or provide command and control over a terrorist network.

And so, they are, basically, you know, on the run and unable to really conduct operations except in a very long term, provide vision and guidance as UBL does, as Usama bin Laden does when he provides one of these tapes or puts out something on the Internet. So we will continue to search them out. We will find them. It is essential that the Pakistan military continue their operations. For the first time, I believe they will stay in the west during the winter so there will not be given opportunities for these folks to go back and find safe have in the same areas that they did before.

President Musharraf has been very effective in working with tribal leaders in both the north and south Waziristan agencies to solicit their help and support, and at the same time provide them government services that they didn't have in the past. And so, we continue to search and we will ultimately be successful.

QUESTION: Sir, very quickly, is there a figure that you can give us of troops involved with this search?

LTGEN SMITH: All of the troops that we have in Afghanistan, you know, save those that are focused on election security are focused on this effort. And it is not just military. I mean, there are intelligence efforts on both sides of the border. This is a total coalition hunt, so I -- you know, to put a number on that would be very difficult. But, you know, they have an entire corps dedicated on the Pakistan side of the border. We have a number of conventional battalions, as well as special forces battalions on the Afghan side of the border all focused on this effort in one form or another.

Now, it's not just on the al-Qaida senior leadership. It is the whole al-Qaida, Hekmatyar, you know, Gulbuddin, Hekmatyar, the Taliban folks that they are focused on, but our primary target is al-Qaida senior leadership.

COL MACHAMER: Okay, one last question and it will be right here.

QUESTION: Thank you. Jocelyn Ramberg from Agence France-Press.

You said a lot of the foreign fighters had probably left Fallujah before the main operation there. Do you think that means that a large part of the problem has just been displaced elsewhere, and do think that means you're going to have to go through big operations in Ramadi or other of those places in the Sunni triangle?

LTGEN SMITH: Yes, ma'am. You know, I say that, that we think they've moved out there, without really knowing. But, I mean, it is our conjecture that some suicidal types stay behind and some chose to go someplace else to fight another day. And so, clearly, they will either go back home, or they will go into places like Ramadi, Mosul, Baghdad, I think, would be a more likely place because I think, you know, with a city that size, they believe they can operate more safely.

But our intent is to not allow any more safe havens like Fallujah to occur in Iraq. We are going to continue after these people. We are going to keep the pressure on them and make sure that they, like Usama bin Laden, are going to have to do this on the run and that they cannot stay anywhere for any length of time, and ultimately, make it so that the Iraqis themselves are capable of controlling this fight and taking back their country from these people who have no positive vision of the future.

It is an interesting thing, if you look at Zarqawi and some of these former regime elements, if you step back and ask what it is that they see for the future of Iraq, there's certainly nothing good. And so, our view is that they are not fighting the coalition, they're fighting Iraq. And this is a fight between extremists and moderates, and in Iraq, the moderates have to win this and we're going to help them.

COL MACHAMER: Well, General Smith, thank you very much, on behalf of the Foreign Press Center for taking valuable time to come visit.

LTGEN SMITH: My pleasure. Thank you very much.



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