

PRESS CONFERENCE:

Maj. Gen. James Simmons, Deputy Commanding General for Support for Multi-National Core – Iraq

DATE: NOVEMBER 15, 2007

TRANSCRIBED BY: SOS INTERNATIONAL, LTD.

PARTICIPANTS: MAJ GEN JAMES SIMMONS

REPORTERS:

LAUREN FRAYER FROM THE AP

JAMES HIDER FROM THE TIMES OF LONDON

MIGUEL MARQUEZ FROM ABC NEWS

LIZ SLY FROM THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

STEPHEN FARRELL FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES

NANCY YOUSSEF FROM MCCLATCHY NEWSPAPERS

REPORTERS 1-3

***REP1 = REPORTER 1**

***INT = INTERPRETER**

MAJ GEN: Good afternoon. I'm Major General Jim Simmons, the Deputy Commanding General for Support for Multi-National Core – Iraq. I am responsible for the day-to-day employment of the core separate commands and brigades to include the 316th Sustainment Command, the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade, the 62nd Medical Brigade, the 11th Signal Brigade, the Battlefield Surveillance Brigade, the MP Brigade, Combined Joint Task Force Troy, and the 20th Engineer Brigade. I'm also responsible for

several focus areas as directed by Lieutenant General Odierno. One of those is Multi-National Core – Iraq’s Counter-IED and IED-Defeat Campaign. The IED has been and remains the enemy’s primary weapon of choice against coalition, Iraqi forces, and Iraqi civilians. Multi-National Core – Iraq views this threat as extremely serious. Consequently over the last eleven months, we have taken several steps in the form of plans conceived and orders issued, forces requested, capabilities enabled, and actions taken on the battlefield to seize the initiative, defeat the enemy, and mitigate the effects of his preferred weapon system. The results of these efforts have manifest over the last four months and are significant. IED attacks and corresponding casualties for coalition forces, Iraqi security forces, and Iraqi civilians have dropped significantly. We have seized the initiative and placed the enemy on the defense. All though each of you is familiar with the additional forces we brought in through June of this year, Multi-National Core – Iraq has also executed several initiatives to enable us to defeat some of the capabilities of our enemies. As the Deputy Commanding General for Support, I recommended to Lieutenant General Odierno earlier this year that we enable our combat engineers to reduce specific IEDs, a task that had previously been restricted to our EOD forces. The intent of this recommendation was two-fold. First, I wanted to provide tactical flexibility to our combat commanders by allowing engineers to conduct their traditional mission of providing mobility for combat and logistics formations. Second, I wanted

to assist our explosives ordinance disposal and weapons intelligence teams in focusing on the most dangerous IEDs and the most promising cache finds. Subsequently in April of this year, the Core issued an order to train and certify combat engineers in the reduction of specific IEDs under specific conditions. In June of this year we issued a second order tasking engineers to begin this mission. By every measure of effectiveness, the intent of these orders is being met. Tactical commanders have greater flexibility and our OED-Wit and Combined Explosives Exploitation Cell are commonly referred to as CEXC, have never been more active and effective in responding to IED incidents and collecting forensic data, responding to a higher percentage of IEDs after the issuance than before and exploiting almost twice the rate of cache finds and producing twice as many biometric matches and near doubling of the apprehension over the last four months as compared to the four months preceding the June order. Additionally, we have also executed several staff initiatives to support our IED defeat efforts. General Odierno established the Multi-National Core Counter-IED Operational Integration Center to focus, integrate, and synchronize all counter-IED efforts throughout the Iraq theater of operations, enabling his major subordinate commands to neutralize the IED network. We also coordinated extensively with the Department of the Army to establish a Multi-National Core – Iraq biometric cell to allow the coalition force to achieve identity dominance, increase efficiency of and coordination of all of our labs, leverage interagency coordination, joint

biometric systems and programs, and to maintain continuity as the major headquarters rotate in and out of theater. We also coordinated with the Department of the Army Provost Marshall General to source the requirement for a forensic laboratory with the capability to work fingerprints, tool markings, and ballistics. The net effect of these combined joint efforts has resulted in an unprecedented of the counter IED fight. Since June of 07, attack and casualty numbers have dropped, and they are the lowest in over two years. Found and cleared rates of IEDs are up, and the highest consistent rates since 2004. Cache finds remains high. In fact, we have found more caches by May of this year than all of 2006. Biometric matches and the resultant detainees are at their highest level, and an ever-increasing number of tips are being provided by the population to Iraqi and coalition forces. Although there remain tough pockets of enemy resistance that must be defeated, reporting through the 14th of November indicates a continuation of these positive trends. All of these efforts are important. We assess that our most promising opportunities to defeat the IED network result from the teaming of all of our capabilities, commands, and Iraqi security forces fused with an offensive-oriented counterinsurgency campaign designed to attack enemy vulnerabilities and secure the population. We have learned that the civilian population, once secured, provides the best ability to identify and eliminate the threat in their local communities. Multi-National Core – Iraq will continue to leverage all of our capabilities in defeating this threat.

I'm very proud of all of the forces that I am responsible for, our engineers, our OED, our weapons intelligence team, the CEXC team, and the special staff section called the COT(C) all continue to perform their duties with courage and distinction. Each provides key capabilities that our offensive formations – that's our brigade combat teams and our multi-national divisions – are leveraging in the defeat of this significant threat. I appreciate the opportunity to provide you that background, and now I am prepared to take your questions.

FRAYER: My name is Lauren Frayer from AP. You said that IED attacks and casualties have dropped. Could you give a percentage drop over a certain period of time? And could you break out the numbers for EFP attacks? The reason I'm asking is General Odierno had said that the numbers of EFPs found and used in Iraq have dropped substantially since the summer and Secretary Gates has said that the Iranians have made a promise to the Iraqi government to stop the flow of weapons into Iraq. I'm wondering if you've seen that happen and if you think that Iran has held to that promise.

MAJ GEN: Okay, sort of the last question first. We have found weapons that we believe are associated with Iran in some of the caches that we have picked up, but most of these weapons appear to have been in Iraq for months. So we have not seen any recent evidence that weapons continue to come across the border into Iraq. We believe that the initiatives and

commitments the Iranians have made appear to be holding up. About numbers. In October there were 1,560 IED events. That compares to 3,239 IED events in March. And the numbers, if you started in March and went down to that October number, they decreased every month during that period of time. As we brought together the effects of the surge the COEC, the operations with our WIT teams, and with the forensics being done by our labs.

HIDER: James Hider from the Times in London. There's been reports from several generals that Al-Qaida has been effectively driven out of Baghdad. And now you're saying that the Iranians are sticking by agreements not to import weapons and explosives here. So who do you think are behind the remaining IEDs?

MAJ Gen: There are elements that are...the statement made that al-Qaida is not as capable as they have been in the past, there are still al-Qaida elements in Iraq that are capable of waging limited combat operations, and IEDs are still their preferred method of doing that. There are other criminal elements that are operating in Iraq that are not associated with AQI that are no longer associated with JAM that also have access to IEDs and they are using those IEDs against coalition, Iraqi forces, and civilians. James, did I answer your question? Okay.

MARQUEZ: I need a little follow up on a couple of things. The 1560 to 3239 numbers, do you know how many of those were in Baghdad? How many in all of Iraq? To say it's either JAM or al-Qaida, maybe you can talk about that. We had this IED explode outside the Green Zone yesterday in an area that is just crawling with cops. You can't throw a stone without hitting a police officer out there. How in the world could they plant an IED there? Is there any information that any of the Iraqi security forces, whether it's police or Army is assisting in IED cells? We live very close to hear, ABC News, and we've had a few very big IEDs at night as well on roads that are well traveled and are patrolled constantly. How does this happen? And 1560 IEDs, while obviously good, is clearly still a very big number.

MAJ GEN: Yes. 1500 IEDs is a significant number. That is across all of Iraq. The IED event that took place here with the Stryker is I think the one you're talking about was struck with an array of EFPs. And we are continuing to work with the Iraqi security forces to determine exactly how that event occurred and how the possibility of that array being placed in the location in which it was placed to determine exactly who was involved and then to make sure that we bring those folks that were involved in that to justice. And we will do that.

MARQUEZ: Is there any indication that there was any assistance provided by Iraqi police or military?

MAJ GEN: We are working with the Iraqis to determine how it happened and who did it.

MARQUEZ: I know it's a tough one, obviously. And on this particular area, though, is there an IED cell targeting this area? I've just noticed a few very big IEDs. A better question, is that the first EFP array you've had in this particular area.

MAJ GEN: That is the first significant IED that has occurred within three kilometers of where that IED went off in four or five months I believe is the correct statement. I have a fellow here in the back of the room that can shake his head yes or no if I said that correct. And he is. That is a correct statement.

MARQUEZ: By significant what do you mean? Because we've had at least two very big ones at night over the last two months. I don't know if they were effective though.

MAJ GEN: That is correct. They were not.

REP1: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: From al-Hora. I want to comment on the question of my colleague. I have two questions. First question, why don't you hold account of the people who are responsible for the security in these areas? If there is an

explosion near the Green Zone, the Iraqi security forces should be held accountable or the MNF-I because they are in the security zone of this area. There should be some inquisition. Second question. Yesterday I entered the area of Adamiyah and the work from this council of the so-called Revolutionary Council of Aradani that they found Iranian money in the headquarters of al-Qaida organization in this area. Do you know about this information? Can you explain this? Do you have information on this issue?

MAJ GEN: On the second question, I do not have any specific information or any general information on the second item that you raised as an issue, and I have seen no reporting on that. As to the first issue that you raised, the Iraqi government, the Iraqi security forces are conducting a review, an investigation – if you want to call it that – as we are about the event that happened here yesterday in front or close to the al-Rasheed Hotel. And we're looking at all aspects of that to determine how it happened and who was responsible for it happening. And those people will be held accountable as we conduct the forensic investigation into this and review all of the aspects of this particular attack that went down.

SLY: Hello, I'm Liz Sly with the Chicago Tribune. Are you saying that there's now no non-al-Qaida Sunni groups involved in planting IEDs?

MAJ GEN: I did not say that.

SLY: And could you also say how many of those two figures you gave, the 3000 and 1000, how many were explosions and how many were ones that were discovered and detonated before they could be exploded?

MAJ GEN: Those that I just laid out there are incidents. That means that that is a weapon that was employed against either our forces, against Iraqi forces, or against Iraqi civilians. Those are detonations. The found and cleared rate, which are those that we find before they go off, has continued to go up. And I'm looking on my little cheat sheet here to see exactly where I wrote that down. The found and cleared rate right now is running at about right at 50%. So, yes.

FARRELL: Stephen Farrell from the New York Times. Two questions related. One, can you give me a sense of when was the last time we saw a rate something like 1,500 IED's across Iraq? Are we talking 2005, 2004, 2003? Just comparable roughly. And secondly...

MAJ GEN: September 05.

FARRELL: September 05. Has it gone up pretty steadily since that point?

MAJ GEN: Yes.

FARRELL: And secondly, geographically, can you talk a bit about Mosul, Kirkuk, down south? Is there a pattern of increased, decreased consistency there?

MAJ GEN: There is a decrease across all of the areas of Iraq. Right now if you were battle tracking where IEDs are detonating, the preponderance of those that are going off now are in MND North's battle space. That would be north of Taji all the way up to Mosul. And over Kirkuk to the Iranian border and west through Talafar and the Sinjar mountains out to the Syrian border. That is the area where most of the IEDs are detonating right now here in Iraq.

FARRELL: So just to follow up, could you give us some numbers on that? What are we talking about roughly? I know there are any parts of those that are particularly badly affected.

MAJ GEN: It's really hard for me to break that number out for you. I think saying that that's where the majority is is probably close enough.

REP2: Can you give a sense of why that's happening in the north, you're finding the most? And also you mentioned that it was September 05 when it was at that rate. What was the rate in September 05 when it was last at this level?

MAJ GEN: It was about the same number that we're talking about. It was right around 1500. Why is the rate higher in MND North? It has to do with the fight that went on earlier in al-Anbar and al-Qaida operatives moving out of al-Anbar and moving into Diyala. We had the fight in Baqubah, pushed them up into the Diyala River Valley and the Hamrin Ridge, the Hamrin Lake area, and pushed some of the al-Qaida guys up into the area running up toward Samarra. And so the fighting in al-Anbar, the success in Baghdad has forced these terrorists out of those areas and into that battle space. And they take their preferred method of killing people with them whenever they're pushed into other areas of Iraq.

REP2: I just want to ask. As you see a decreased level of IEDs, is there a new form of attack that you're seeing on civilians, American or Iraqi security forces taking its place?

MAJ GEN: No, we have not seen a new form. You know you have those IEDs that are placed on the roads, you have suicide vests, you have vehicle-borne IEDs. Of course in Baqubah we encountered some fairly significant house-borne IEDs where they had wired the houses for explosives as we were clearing Baqubah. You have several different techniques for employing them, from a victim-operated where you drive over a pressure plate and it causes the weapon system once to arm to detonate to those that are more sophisticated. They are in many cases fairly sophisticated

devices. The idea that these are simple forms of munitions that are used against our forces is not correct. In many cases they are very clearly put together with people that have at least the education of an electrical engineers. And so they are in many cases a fairly significant weapon system. Yes, ma'am.

YOUSSEF: Nancy Youssef with McClatchy Newspapers. You mentioned that the number had dropped from March onward. In your mind, what do you see are some of the most immediate threats to that number rising up? What are you watching for as things that could trigger that number going back up again?

MAJ GEN: What would trigger it to go back up would be an event that would once again cause the Iraqi people to allow these kinds of insurgents or these kinds of terrorists to operate in their neighborhoods, in their villages, and in their towns. Right now, the Iraqi people have rejected this idea of IEDs. And as a result many of these caches that we are finding with hundreds of weapon systems in them are coming from tips from Iraqi people who are living in the neighborhoods where these criminals are operating, and they're tired of it.

YOUSSEF: What are examples of the kinds of events that could cause that to turn around?

MAJ GEN: Well, I'm sitting here trying to think of that. Right now with the way that the local populations, the way the local leaderships and communities are working with the Iraqi security forces and the Iraqi government, as they continue to do that, I think that significantly minimizes the opportunity for those kinds of things to come back. So I can't define for you what would be a catalyst to turn it around. I think that if they things continue to go the way they are currently going, that things are going to continue to get better, not turn and reverse and go in the other direction.

REP3: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: There have been some reports about discovering seven car bombs in the area of al-Habbaniyah. How did you discover these car bombs? What are the kinds of these car bombs? Any more information about them?

MAJ GEN: There were several vehicles. I don't know exactly what the number is that were found in a garage. It was information that was turned over to the Iraqi security forces by local Iraqi citizens that believe – as I have read in the reports – that these were unusual vehicles that were parked in this garage and did not belong there. It was something that was out of ordinary in the neighborhood, and whenever the Iraqi security forces investigated it, they discovered that there were a number of these vehicles that were rigged as vehicle-borne IEDS. And there were a smaller number

that were in the preparation of being converted to vehicle-borne IEDs. And so we worked...at the Iraqi security force's request, we came in with some of our teams and did some forensic examination of these and we helped them reduce those very dangerous weapons.

Well, they passed me the information to your question up here. We had 1,560 events in October and 763 of those exploded. I think that was the information that you were looking for. 767 were found and cleared. For March...March...March...let's see...1,641 exploded and 1,489 were found and cleared.

REP4: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: This center you have established to combat IEDs, is there any progress in forensic evidence like installing cameras in Baghdad or the sonar equipment to detect the IEDs and inform the Joint Information Center about any terrorist organizations or the car bombs? This from work is there any increase in the number of new modern equipments in Baghdad to detect the explosive materials in Baghdad and other areas, other governors? Thank you.

MAJ GEN: The first thing that I would say is that the forensic labs that we have are labs that operate in the same way that law enforcement labs operate in the United States. These are examinations of material in which they

determine patterns where we can identify exactly how many, or if there is (A) IED maker that is involved in a particular area because, they all, whether they intend to or not, leave their own signature on their work. And so we then collect that information and then develop a pattern of life on this individual who does not have a face or a name at that point in time but we understand, we get an understanding from the forensic examination of where they get their material, how they get their material, how they get their financing, how they get all of these other activities. And then sooner or later that leads us to a face and a name. And then we go get them.

REP5: I'm Ryan from AFP. Back to the Iranian weapons. How can you tell for example EFPs used yesterday didn't come from across the border a few days before that? In the past, commanders would arrive here with a jagged piece of metal and say this came from Iran. And now you're finding huge caches with Iranian weapons, and by looking at them you're able to say that they've been here for months.

MAJ GEN: Yes, we have for most of the caches that we have found, we have been able to determine that those weapon systems have been here for months. Part of that has to do with our ability to analyze how long they have been in the location where we have found them. And that is scientific evidence, not necessarily based off human reporting. It is based off scientific analysis of how long the IEDs have been here. You know, sir, I would be

very honest with you. If we found evidence that a weapon system had just come across the border from Iran, we would be standing here telling you about it. I promise you that. But right now I have not had any evidence laid in front of me that says that they have violated the commitment that they made.

UNK: Shukran. Will that be all for the questions? The General will stay behind and talk...

MAJ GEN: And let me also offer this. I have some folks in the back of the room, Colonel Karl Reinhard who is the commander of Task Force Troy, Colonel Jim Hickey who is the Director of the COEC, the guy that I've been talking about who's been putting a lot of this stuff together. I have Colonel Gray back here who is the director of our engineer staff. And I also have Lieutenant Colonel Vickery back here who is the commander of one of the engineer battalions that is responsible for the route clearance mission up on Route Tampa up out of Bilad. And those guys are here, and you're more than welcome to talk to them as well whenever we finish. And I'll make myself available to any of you that would like to ask any individual questions. Thank you very much.