

SPECIAL DEFENSE DEPARTMENT BRIEFING

TOPIC: SECURITY OPERATIONS IN IRAQ

BRIEFER:

COLONEL DON FARRIS, U.S. ARMY, COMMANDER, 2ND BRIGADE COMBAT  
TEAM,  
82ND AIRBORNE DIVISION; PAUL FOLMSBEE, EMBEDDED PROVINCIAL  
RECONSTRUCTION TEAM LEADER

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(Note: Colonel Farris appears via teleconference from Iraq.)

COL. GARY KECK (director, Department of Defense Press Office): Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the Pentagon briefing room. I'm Colonel Gary Keck, the director of the Press Office, and it is my privilege to introduce to you today from Iraq Colonel Don Farris, who's the commander of the 2nd Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division, the Falcon Brigade, and his Provincial Reconstruction Team leader, Mr. Paul Folmsbee.

Colonel Farris's brigade arrived in Iraq in January this year, and this is -- he's the first of the five surge brigades that went into Iraq. And Mr. Folmsbee joined the team a couple of months ago. So they've been working together for a couple months now.

This is the first time ever briefing us in this format, so we welcome them. And we will obviously do our normal routine of turning it over to them for some opening comments, and then we'll go into Q&A. So with that, Colonel Farris, over to you.

COL. FARRIS: Well, good morning. As Bryan (sic) said, I'm Colonel Don Farris, and with me today is Mr. Paul Folmsbee, the team leader from the brigade Embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team, or EPRT. Together we represent the soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and EPRT members of the Falcon Brigade, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division.

I appreciate this opportunity to highlight some of the recent developments in our area of operations and to answer any questions you may have.

The 2nd Brigade Combat Team was the first of the surge brigades to deploy to Iraq in support of Operation Fard al-Qanun. We were alerted in late December, deployed to Baghdad in January and immediately began operations.

Our operating environment in northeast Baghdad includes the security districts of Adhamiya and Sadr City. Both present unique challenges. Adhamiya is home for a large Sunni neighborhood and also includes the Abu Hanifa mosque, among one of the most sacred Sunni shrines in Baghdad. And of course Sadr City is well-known by all of you, I'm sure.

When we first arrived in January, the sectarian violence was occurring at an unprecedented level. Whole-scale murder and displacement of families from both sects was alarming. Al Qaeda remained organized, determined and extremely lethal, and Shi'a militia death squads operated with impunity, committing horrific acts of violence against Iraqi citizens.

I am happy to report today the situation on the ground is dramatically improving. Overall, attacks in our sector have decreased by 75 percent since the 1st of May. Also important to note is the increased willingness of Iraqi citizens to provide information about terrorist and criminal activity. In recent months, the number of tips have jumped approximately 300 percent.

In Adhamiya, the Iraqi security forces continue to take the lead in protecting their citizens. We have observed incredible momentum from the concerned local citizens' groups, as well as increased trust and commitment to work cooperatively with the Iraqi security forces. The progress of the Iraqi army has reached a stage in Adhamiya where we can now focus more time partnering with the Iraqi police and support their efforts to enforce the rule of law and establish a sense of normalcy.

Sustaining these improved conditions will require more than military action alone. As I said before, joining me today is Mr. Paul Folmsbee of the EPRT. Paul is a senior Foreign Service officer from the Department of State. He and his team, which includes a senior representative from USAID and other subject matter experts in economic development, essential services, governance and rule of law, bring a unique capability that is tremendously important and allow us to exploit the recent security successes.

Although the violence is down, we still have a lot of work to do. Every day in our sector we continue to see signs of reconciliation among the various groups at the grass-root level. The mixed neighborhoods in our sector are working together to help defeat what remains of the terrorist networks, and they're increasingly asserting their influence with the government of Iraq to improve essential services.

One thing is for sure: the Iraqi people we talk to are tired of the violence, and they want it to stop.

A reconciliation in our sector will take time. I've learned that personal relationships are very important in Iraqi culture, and small overtures can carry great weight when you're attempting to build trust and confidence between rival groups -- (audio break) -- work through their differences has its own pace, but we are seeing the signs of growing momentum.

Finally, I would like to thank the families and friends back home of our deployed soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and EPRT members in the Falcon Brigade for their devotion and sacrifices through many long months of combat. America can be very proud of the accomplishments of its sons and daughters. They are amazing young people, and their courage and dedication deserve great praise and admiration. I have seen it firsthand, and I honestly believe the American soldier can accomplish any challenge, as long as they have the support of the American people back home.

Thank you for keeping all of us in your thoughts and your prayers. Paul and I will now be glad to answer your questions.

COL. KECK: Okay. Kristin, go ahead.

Q Sir, Kristin Roberts with Reuters. I'm hoping you can give us an idea of the scale of your operations in Sadr City. It's been about three months since Muqtada al-Sadr declared the cease-fire or the -- I guess it is a cease-fire. Can you give us any idea of what indication you have that the cease-fire will be maintained over the next three months and any indication that you have from the people in Sadr City about the ability to continue the cease-fire even after the six-month period is up?

COL. FARRIS: Well, I can't predict the future and what Muqtada al-Sadr might do or say. I can tell you right now that as long as the cease-fire holds, we have communicated to many of the citizens in our sector the Jaish al-Mahdi is not the enemy, that we're only concerned about those who continue this cycle of violence. We have many reports, and through our contacts, many mainstream Sadrists communicate to us that they agree with this cease-fire, that it is holding, and we applaud that.

As far as the scale of our operations, we currently operate day to day in about 20 percent of the land space, if you will, inside Sadr City, and that's mostly in the commercial district. We've maintained a very careful balance. We have decided not to introduce a large number of coalition forces into the heart of Sadr City, because we don't want to create a flash point, and it's going to take time before, you know, we resolve some of the concerns that occurred in 2004, and we hope for increased dialogue with the civic leaders and the citizens inside Sadr City before we try to do more.

Q How much of that 75 percent decrease in attacks is directly attributable to the cease-fire?

COL. FARRIS: I can't say with exact clarity. The most lethal sector in our battlespace was the enclave of old Adhamiya. But with the recent advent of the

concerned local citizens, which started in July, al Qaeda is significantly crushed in those neighborhoods. They are no longer effective. We have seen a significant drop in just ordinary attacks of all types across our sector, so that would include the Shi'a neighborhoods.

The only area that I am still concerned about is the employment of the explosive-formed projectiles, the EFPs. Last month actually was the highest month since I've been here for the number of EFPs employed against our soldiers or found. You know, these are the Iranian-made weapons that are being employed by these special groups that -- these Shi'a extremists that are receiving funding support and training from Iran.

COL. KECK: Courtney.

Q Hey, Colonel. This is Courtney Kube from NBC News. Just following up on the EFP stat that you just provided -- well, for starters, can you tell us how many were found or employed last month and then give us sort of a frame of reference from when you first arrived? And then also, to what do you attribute this increase? I mean, is there any way that you can tell whether these EFP parts are newer that have been brought into the country, if they're part of an old store? We've been hearing that the Iranian weapons that have been used or have been found in Iraq seem to be older and that there's not new materials being brought in. Is that what you're finding as well?

COL. FARRIS: Well, I won't be able to tell you whether or not it's old munitions or new munitions. We do some pretty good forensics, but I don't have that data.

As far as statistics, I can tell you that the highest spike we experienced was about seven per month back in April and May, and then of course in October, we either had nine employed against us or we found; both employed and found totalling for nine.

So that represents a little bit of an increase. As I said, we've seen a decline in the violence both from al Qaeda -- I think we've got them on the run -- and from mainstream JAM, if you will. The special groups, I have not seen those attacks abate. I have not seen any indication that they intend to stop or that they are adhering to this cease-fire.

Q And so when you refer to special groups, do you mean specifically Jaish al-Mahdi or the splinter groups of Muqtada al-Sadr's group, or who specifically?

COL. FARRIS: Well, that is a very complex question. The special groups are Shi'a extremists, and they're receiving support and funding from Iran, we assess. They're employing Iranian munitions and they operate from within the heart of Sadr City. Many were former Jaish al-Mahdi, hard for us to tell whether or not they sustain support from mainstream Sadrists or not. So I guess I would characterize them as Shi'a extremists who are receiving some form of support from Iran.

COL. KECK: Pauline.

Q Sir, it's Pauline Jelinek of the Associated Press. I believe you said you were seeing signs of growing momentum toward reconciliation. Can you give us some details on that, examples?

COL. FARRIS: Sure. The markets are flourishing. The biggest example probably is the recent, I guess, coming together of the Adhamiya DAC. You had a district council in Adhamiya made up of both Sunni and Shi'a, who, when the sectarian violence began last summer, would not agree to ever meet together, certainly in their security district, and in the last several weeks they have agreed to do that. They have met with the senior leaders of the Iraqi security forces, both the Sunni and Shi'a members, and there is a tremendous sense of willingness that we've observed now to start working together to increase the number of essential services that are brought into Adhamiya, both the Sunni neighborhoods, the Shi'a neighborhoods and the mixed neighborhoods.

The concerned local citizens, initially a lot of friction with whether or not they were going to cooperate or support the Iraqi security forces. On 10 November we had a defining moment. The Iraqi security -- or these concerned local citizens got into a fight in old Adhamiya, and the Iraqi army came to the rescue.

Since that defining moment, there has been a tremendous amount of willingness between the concerned local citizens and the Iraqi army to work together. They understand they're supposed to work for the Iraqi security forces, and they have been providing a lot of tips and a tremendous amount of cooperation.

As we engage in each of the NACs, the neighborhood councils talk to the sheikhs and the local leaders, they now more than ever come and talk to us and the various commanders out there in the sector as a united group. You'll get a council -- (audio break) -- and Shi'a, civic leaders come talk to us, as well as sheikhs, and both of them, arm in arm, coming forward to express their concerns and how they want to govern their neighborhoods and how they would like to get assistance from the coalition.

So we're seeing little sparks of it all across our sector, and it is very encouraging.

MR. FOLMSBEE: If I could just add, in northern Adhamiya particularly, there is -- I would just add that in northern Adhamiya particularly, there is significant interaction between Sunni and Shi'a, and it's actually produced a fairly safe environment in that sector. So there's actually a lot, as the colonel is saying, there's a lot of interaction at the local level that is actually quite promising.

Q It's Jamie McIntyre from CNN, and I have a question for each of you. First, the gentleman from the State Department, Paul --

COL KECK: Paul Folmsbee.

Q Folmsbee? I'm sorry. I apologize, I forgot your name.

First of all, as you're no doubt aware, some of your colleagues at the State Department have been less than enthusiastic about volunteering for service in Iraq. Tell us a little bit about -- first of all, how bad is it? What are you doing? And why do you think it's important? And then I just have a follow-up for Colonel Farris after you finish.

MR. FOLMSBEE: Well, I think that that whole issue was sort of poorly understood. I would point out that in the Foreign Service, there are people serving all over the world in hardship assignments, including Baghdad. In Baghdad right now, all of our positions have been filled by volunteers. So, really, that is not -- it's not so much of an issue. Most of our officers are extremely committed to the mission.

And for me personally, it's been a fantastic experience working with the 2nd 82nd. And we really do have an opportunity here to work on economic development and governance in partnership with the U.S. military. So I think at all levels it's worked out really well.

I think the true issue really is the budget. That is, that the State Department is actually a fairly small organization and right now we're operating on a continuing resolution. And I think if we're going to really be a force, with Arabic-speaking officers out here, then we need to fund that budget.

Q For Colonel Farris. The news from Iraq recently -- including the kind of news that you've talked about -- has produced a wave of reports back here in the United States suggesting a bit of optimism, even sometimes euphoria, that they think this war is winnable. You hear that phrase a lot now. What is your perception about whether the effort in Iraq is winnable?

COL. FARRIS: Well, Jamie, I can only speak to what I see in my sector. And I am encouraged. If you were to walk through the areas that we control several months ago, to see the desolation caused by years of war, the garbage that had built up, the inactivity in the markets and, you know, deserted streets and areas where folks just flat wouldn't go because it was too dangerous, I have seen a remarkable turnaround. As I mentioned just a minute ago, the markets have come back like gangbusters. People are out in the streets. The traffic is congested. You know, you see vibrant signs of life all across our sector, and to make it -- it looks like a normal city. All of that encouraging.

The increased willingness by the local civic leaders to -- (audio break) -- to go to these little town hall meetings where the neighborhood councils and the district council get together and to hear them argue amongst each other about normal things that you would see in a normal town hall meeting. All of those things are encouraging. And, again, you have to acknowledge that the attacks and the violence is significantly down.

So I'm encouraged. Reconciliation is a long process, and over here, you know, I've learned that things kind of work on their time. It doesn't necessarily work on the time that I would like or the time that fits, you know, the schedule of events I would like to complete, but it is working. And again, I am encouraged.

Q Surge brigades -- the first of the surge brigades, I'm told -- did the surge strategy work?

COL. FARRIS: The short answer is yes. The surge definitely worked. We put military forces -- in our sector, we put military forces where they were not -- U.S. forces - - where they were not operating, where neighborhoods had been retaken by either al Qaeda or these Shi'a militia death squads. We have destroyed, defeated, disrupted or run them completely out of the neighborhoods, and as a result, the violence is down and we have created an opportunity for these neighborhoods to rebuild themselves, for people to regain a sense of normalcy, to reengage in the political process. So, from my foxhole in our sector, it is working.

Q Sir, to Mr. Folmsbee, first, if you could spell your last name, I think that might help us all.

And you talk about -- what sort of projects are the PRTs engaging in that are sort of cementing this progress in place?

MR. FOLMSBEE: Well, first of all, yeah, I'm Paul Folmsbee. That's F-O-L-M-S-B-E-E.

And you know, I think just a general comment on the approach -- the PRT is looking generally longer-term. The U.S. military's doing a fantastic job coming in and, with CERP projects in other areas, solving immediate problems, broken sewers that are right in front of them.

What we're doing is -- in Adhamiya, for example, we're working with the government of Iraq to work on a heavy fuel oils program that will solve in a year some of the intermediate needs of electricity for that whole district. And so we have an expert here, subject matter expert, working with the government of Iraq to solve that problem, in conjunction with the brigade. So --

Q Any others -- can you give us just a couple other examples of the sort of things you're working on?

MR. FOLMSBEE: Sure. Well, then let me just give more of an overview. The -- we are divided up into rule of law, governance, economic development and essential services. And in each of these areas, I have a team working on specific projects. And just as an example, in rule of law, we are setting up a legal center, which will work on indigent legal care for women in Sadr City and Adhamiya. We're also working on a(n) omnibuds -- ombudsman -- excuse me; I can't say that word -- program in Adhamiya to assist in detainee issues. So there's a lot of projects just in rule of law. We're working on the curriculum of the school of law in Adhamiya as well.

In the economic development area, we've got a great program going on markets, looking at how we can bring the produce from the -- from Iraq itself into the markets of Baghdad, how it's sold, and that complements the safe markets that the colonel is working on.

COL. FARRIS: And I will just add the -- this market initiative -- I'm pretty excited about that. You know, we've searched and kind of fumbled for many months to figure out how do we jump-start the economy, how do we get increased employment to get these military-age males some -- you know, some form of earning a living, so that they aren't enticed to commit violence. And these markets are -- they are a unique Iraqi solution. And by just creating a little bit of security, going in and working with these co-ops, providing some microloans, it has really flourished in our sector. And we're very enthusiastic about that particular initiative.

COL. KECK: Jeff?

Q Colonel, Jeff Schogol, Stars and Stripes. You were talking about these special groups that receive funding and training from Iran. Can you say -- have you seen any data on the trends? Are they getting more training and funding from Iran, less, or is it staying about the same?

COL. FARRIS: I can't -- I don't have visibility on overall trends. I can tell you what I've observed in my sector in just the last six weeks.

First of all, in our engagements in Sadr City, both with a number of sheikhs, with imams and with civic leaders, all of these groups have acknowledged that -- they call them outsiders -- that there are outsiders operating in their city. And when they speak of them, they certainly don't like it, and they don't care for the influence that's going on inside Sadr City.

In the last weeks, our last six weeks, we have captured two Iranian operatives. We have captured two Iraqis. One was significant because he admitted to receiving training in Iran in building and employing these explosive formed projectiles. And another was -- admitted to working as an agent for somebody or some group in Iran.

We had at least -- one of our bases in our sector on the 18th was attacked by what we call lob bombs. They were fabricated with pretty sophisticated technology using 107 rockets and C-4 that's consistent with Iranian-made C-4, targeting our soldiers at one of the coalition COPs. And we've had many intel reports and from detainees that we have captured, talking about the flow in financing and weapons being brought into Sadr City, which has -- which is really a hub for these activities coming from Iran.

So while the violence is down, I remain very concerned in our sector about these special groups. They're very lethal. They're organized. They're sophisticated. And I have not seen that their operations have declined or diminished in any way, shape or form here in the last several months.

Q (Off mike) -- Iranians you detained, who do they work for?

COL. FARRIS: I'm going to ask you to put that -- (audio break) -- I -- quite frankly, I'm not sure if that's a piece of information we want to release just yet. So not knowing whether or not that's releasable, let me defer on that one.

COL. KECK: Al, and then we'll do one more.

Q Colonel, it's Al Pessin from Voice of America. I wanted to just try to get a little bit more on the special groups and the Iranians. You gave the October statistic. Since it's almost the end of November, can you give us the partial statistics on the EFPs in your sector for November?

Also, although you say the special groups are still active, have you seen, from your foxhole, any indication that the materiel has stopped flowing from Iran, as we heard, as Courtney mentioned earlier?

And there was this recent bombing over the weekend, apparently by one of these - - what you're calling special groups. And the report was that they tried to make it seem like al Qaeda had done it, in order to get another cycle started. So can you confirm that? Is that what they're trying to do? Is there a particular style of operations that they're trying to emulate in order to disguise their activities?

COL. FARRIS: Yeah, I -- let me answer the last part of your question first. I can't confirm or deny that either way. I would defer that back to Multinational Division Baghdad. That attack occurred out of our sector, I believe on the west side of the river.

As to the statistics on EFPs, I don't have the November statistics, but I can send those to you through the public affairs, if you would like.

And I forget what the third part was.

Q The third part was whether you've seen any indication that the flow of material for EFPs has stopped or slowed down, as we've been told by other sources.

COL. FARRIS: I can tell you -- I can speak for my sector, and in my sector, the assessment is, we have not seen any slowing down or any indicators that these special groups are going to curtail their activities or quit receiving this support that's coming from outside the country.

Q Thank you, and we'll look for those statistics, but can you just tell us in general -- is it about like October? Higher or lower? Do you have an idea?

COL. FARRIS: It's less right now, but part of that is the way we have attempted to counter this. I mentioned before we're -- that we use barriers in many ways. We have

had -- through the month of November, we have put in a substantial amount of barriers using the "safe roads" concept. I think that's made a difference. We have employed barriers at a couple of key checkpoints on the west side of Sadr City. I think that's limited the ability of these groups to come into the Shaab and Ur area, where they were employing these EFPs. And we've also employed a number of barriers in a neighborhood in Biyeda (ph), which I think will also make a difference here in the near future.

So some of this was, I think, the way we reacted to these attacks in October, and that reduced some of these attacks. That in no way implies that I think that they're less lethal or if we didn't take steps, they wouldn't commit those attacks. So right now, my assessment is, we don't see any decline in these activities.

Q (Off mike) -- you attribute to the EFPs in October?

COL. FARRIS: I'm sorry. Say again?

Q I said, how many casualties did you attribute to the EFP attacks in October?

COL. FARRIS: Numbers of casualties. I know that -- I know we had two or three, but I don't have the exact stats in front of me, and if you'll allow me, I'll send you those statistics.

COL. KECK: Luis?

Q Gentlemen, it's Luis Martinez with ABC News.

If I could direct this question at both you, you both mentioned that there is good local interaction between the Sunnis and the Shi'ites at the local level. Can I ask you what their sense is about that type of reconciliation at the national level with regards to the central government? Is there a sense of frustration there? Are they rejecting the central government? What are their feelings about the lack of progress on the national level?

COL. FARRIS: (To Mr. Folmsbee) Do you want to -- you take that one.

MR. FOLMSBEE: You know, I would just say that we probably don't have good visibility on the national level. And we do see some evidence that some of our leadership in Sadr City and Adhamiya are, in fact, interacting in an increasing way with the national level, but I don't think we can give you a very good answer on that because we don't have good visibility at the national level.

Q Sir, can you just tell -- we've been hearing reports that Iraqis have been coming back to their homes because of the reduced violence. Are you seeing that? To what level are you seeing it? And do you think it is because of the reduced violence?

COL. FARRIS: Well, much of the displacement had occurred by the time our brigade deployed in the sector. We are seeing a trickle, if you will -- that's probably the best term to categorize it -- a trickle of families returning back to their neighborhoods. Now, we've asked many of the civic leaders and the locals. And most of this in our sector had occurred in the old Adhamiya area, and we've asked them, "Hey, what are you hearing from the folks who are out of the country? When do you think they'll return?" Many of them have told us that, "Well, we talk to them often, they're curious about the improvements in the security conditions," but the latest data point I have is many of them have asked, "Well, when will the essential services get working?" And once they see that working, many have indicated their desire to return. So that's probably as much as we know.

I certainly would like to see them come back faster than they're coming back right now. These empty homes and houses in the old Adhamiya area are the exact types of dwellings that these -- the al Qaeda groups can use as a safe house to hide munitions and to plan and conduct their activities, so the more you can get these families back into their homes, you deny these areas as a place where al Qaeda can operate.

Q It's Pauline at the AP again. Sir, could you just clarify what is the state of services now? Water, electricity, are they back up to pre-war levels? Or what are the issues if they're not?

COL. FARRIS: I couldn't provide you those metrics in my sector. Those metrics are really measured Baghdad-wide and Iraq-wide. What I will tell you is that until the security condition started to improve, which we've seen in the last few months, the workers from the Amanat, the city government, if you will, they just flat couldn't come into areas like old Adhamiya or in some places in Shaab and Ur and execute contracts without fear of being attacked or killed or run off by either al Qaeda or the Shi'a extremists.

Now that the violence is significantly down, I'm starting to see and I get reports from commanders throughout our sector that more and more of the workers from the Amanat are coming into sector, they're making assessments on what it takes to improve this horrific sewage problem that they have, little initiatives to do rewiring to get some of the -- you know, get more efficiency out of the electrical grid. We see more trash bins being put up, particularly in the northwest portion of our AO, and the Amanat trash trucks actually now starting to work. And all of this, again, takes time to get organized, to get the bureaucracy going, but they couldn't do it because of, you know, the security conditions.

So I'm seeing improvements. Getting the lights on certainly would help. We're doing what we can at our level with these other initiatives; you know, trying to get more efficiency out of what there is. But it certainly would be an enormous improvement for the quality of life of the average Iraqi citizen to see the lights come on, you know, more than they are right now in the city.

MR. FOLMSBEE: There's no question, though, that there is an upswing in the provision of services. And I don't want to overstate that, but I think in terms of measurable criteria -- we don't have the data in front of us, but I think that generally speaking there are projects that are steadily coming on line that produce more water, that will produce more electricity. So I think there is room for encouragement there.

COL. KECK: One question.

Q Hi, Colonel Farris. This is Ann Scott Tyson from The Washington Post. You've seen in Adhamiya the dynamic with the concerned local citizens turning against al Qaeda, but could you describe the dynamics between the mainstream Shi'a groups in Sadr City and their attitude vis-a-vis these special groups, and whether or not you see any potential to exploit a sort of grassroots momentum there in the Shi'a community?

COL. FARRIS: That's a great question. And we get that from many of our Shi'a Iraqi counterparts. First of all, the concerned local citizens program is not just an initiative for the Sunni neighborhoods. And in Adhamiya, we are executing this program not only in old Adhamiya, which is predominantly a Sunni neighborhood; we're doing it in the mixed neighborhoods, in Qahira, Rabi, Basatin, Tunis, and we're now just starting in the neighborhoods of Shaab and Ur, which is predominantly Shi'a. So we're trying to achieve a balanced approach with this, and I think that's starting to resonate amongst many of the Shi'a population.

In Sadr City, again because the dialogue there is not open, we don't have a very effective process for communicating with the civic leaders, we're holding off on proceeding with any initiatives for concerned local citizens until that dialogue increases.

Does that answer the question?

Q Thank you very much.

COL. KECK: Well, gentlemen, we are past our time. We appreciate you giving us a few more moments today. And as is our custom, we would like to turn it back over to Colonel Farris or Mr. Folmsbee to make any final remarks.

So, gentlemen, back to you.

COL. FARRIS: Paul, you want to --

MR. FOLMSBEE: Sure. Why don't I just say that it's been a great pleasure to work out here. And I think one take-away from all this is the great partnership that's forming between the Department of State and Department of Defense in forming up these Provincial Reconstruction Teams and the future impacts that we're making here and also, I believe, in Afghanistan.

So I think this is a great process that we're participating in, and I really I look forward to continuing in that vein. So it's something that's really, really gone a good long way in solving some of the problems here.

That's all I have.

COL. FARRIS: Okay. One of my guys slipped me a note here as to -- (audio break) -- in November, concerning EFPs, we had three so far in the month of November, zero casualties because of those three. And we still owe you the casualty figures for October, and I will get those to you.

Again, thank you for allowing us an opportunity to answer your questions. I would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to the families, friends and loved ones of our deployed troopers, who continue to sustain us with their love, their courage and their prayers. God bless you all, and thank you.

COL. KECK: Thank you again, gentlemen. Thanks for being here.

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