

Army Lt. Gen. James Dubik, commander, Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq March 04, 2008

DoD News Briefing with Lt. Gen. Dubik from the Pentagon Briefing Room, Arlington, Va.

BRYAN WHITMAN (deputy assistant secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Welcome, and good morning.

General Dubik, this is Bryan Whitman at the Pentagon. Can you hear me okay?

GEN. DUBIK: I sure can. Good morning, Bryan.

MR. WHITMAN: We hear you fine and we're seeing you here in the briefing room. And I'd like to welcome you. And it's my privilege to introduce to the Pentagon press corps here Lieutenant General James Dubik, who is the commander of Multinational Security Transition Command in Iraq -- MNSTC-I, as we know it.

General Dubik and his organization is responsible for assisting the Iraqi government in the development, organization, training, equipping and sustaining of Iraqi security forces. He assumed these responsibilities and this mission in June of 2007, and we welcome him for his first briefing to us in this format. We appreciate you taking the time this evening, General, and hope that we will do this periodically with you.

I remind all of you out here on this side that he is speaking to us today from Baghdad and has a brief operation -- or overview that he would like to provide to you. Unfortunately, he has some slides that I don't think we've gotten yet, but if we get them, we'll provide them to you. But he's prepared to do it without his slides, too.

So General, again, thank you for your time, and let me turn it over to you.

GEN. DUBIK: Thank you, Bryan. Good morning everyone. Thanks for being here.

There has been, as you all know, significant reductions in violence, significant reductions in deaths, and these are signs of pretty big progress. Of course, the war is not over. The enemies are still -- of Iraq are still trying to figure out a way to re-ignite the sectarian violence that they did in early 2006 and capitalize on that. So far they've been unsuccessful, but they're still very much trying to do that.

We'll have several months more of tough fighting, no doubt about that, but there's also no doubt that there's been significant progress on the security front, and big progress on the political front in the last several months -- 2008 budget passed, limited amnesty law passed, the Provincial Powers Act also passed, Justice and Accountability Act passed, new flag passed.

And we'll have trouble, I'm sure, difficulty in implementation and final signing, but there's also no doubt that the Council of Representatives -- Iraqi Council of Representatives has made big progress on the political front.

But my intent here this morning with you is to talk about how the Iraqi security forces have taken advantage of this period of decreased violence. And I hope through most of your questions and answers to convince you that on some areas we're progressing very, very well, in other areas still have work to do. So the bottom line is a mixed picture.

Numbers count in this kind of war, as all of you know. Physical presence counts and the Iraqi security forces know that. They have grown in 2007 well over 100,000 in the army, air force, the navy, the police -- the national police, and most of that growth was in the period June of 2007 through December of 2007. For example, the army in 2007 grew by 60,000-plus, 42,000-plus in the last half of the year. The national police grew 8,000 in 2007, all of it in the last half of 2007. And the Iraqi police grew by about 45,000 -- a little bit less than 45,000 in 2007, 29,000 in the last half of 2007.

So the story of numbers is a pretty good picture. But numbers are necessary, but insufficient. It's quality also that we count, and there's several indicators here that are pretty significant. First, the percentage of boots on the ground in the second half of 2007 went from mid-60s to low 80s. This is a big shift in the number of people who are actually in the army, actually on the ground in their battalions in their battle space. Numbers of officers now in the aggregate is 73 percent of officer requirements are filled; 69 percent of NCOs are filled.

This is in the aggregate.

We do still have problems with distribution. In general, officers are -- too many in the lower ranks and too many in the higher ranks and not enough in between, and NCOs too many in the -- quite a few in the lower ranks but not enough in the higher ranks. But eight, nine months ago, the problem was insufficient leaders and now we're into a different problem.

The other good quality indicator in terms of the Iraqi army is units set fielding approach to their forces. What they do now for their battalions and brigades -- finish basic training, go to a training center at Besmaya, get their equipment, get their leaders and conduct several more weeks of training, and then enter the battlespace as a coherent unit, with their leaders and with their equipment. This has allowed most units to skip ORA Level 4 and go right to 3, and accelerate to ORA Level 2.

ORA Levels 1 and 2 in the army have been relatively constant -- only about 3 percent increase in the last half of 2007. But from my standpoint, that was a constant, even as they grew by the 45,000 at the end of the year that I describe.

A different story in national police. They grew again by 8,000. Their ORA levels went up a little bit more, 6 percent, in ORA Level 2, and with fewer in ORA Level 3. They don't have anybody in ORA Level 1 yet. And that's intentional. When they get to a high 2, they split off some of their leaders and form their new units in a cross-leveling of leaders.

The national police have also made several qualitative improvements in their leadership. They've changed out both of their division commanders -- 10 of the nine brigade commanders -- that's correct; one brigade commander changed twice -- and 17 of their 28 battalion commanders. They're in their third cycle of training from the Italian Carabinieri leader training to increase their proficiency. This will go on for a couple of years. And the national police reform program is going pretty well.

There are two areas that I watch in terms of polls. We started polling Iraqis in their attitude toward their security forces last November, and in two important areas: the question "Do you disagree with the fact that the Iraqi security forces are corrupt?" There are many more people now, over 10 percent, who are disagreeing that that's correct. So they're having more confidence in their security forces, by their own measure.

Foreign military sales, also important, because that's the way the Iraqis have chosen -- the primary way they have chosen to equip their forces. Last summer we were in under \$20 million worth of equipment delivered. Now we're over \$1 billion of equipment delivered. So we have different problems now. Delivery is going fine, and now we're focusing on reducing the processing time in Baghdad and in Washington, D.C.

The shift in focus with Multinational Force Iraq's joint campaign plan went from looking at our problem in terms of security or transition to trying to combine the two, security while transitioning.

And that has allowed extra focus on force generation and force replenishment.

These two processes we're calling as one stimulant to get two responses. The first response is a better Iraqi security force. The second response are more proficient ministers and ministries of defense and interior. And I'll be happy to take some of your questions about that.

Combat power: I've talked about enablers before, when I was back in D.C. You've heard other people talk about them. Combat power in a military is a combination of things: intelligence, maneuver, fires, aviation, logistics, mobility, countermobility and command and control. And it's how all these seven items blend together that you get combat power.

We had been focused to -- our main focus has been on building the maneuver forces, thinking correctly so, in my view, that the maneuver forces of the Iraqi security

forces could rely on coalition enablers: coalition intelligence, command and control, fires, aviation, et cetera.

And while the primary focus has been on maneuver, we have created 12 divisions, 42 brigades, 146 battalions, a brigade of special operations forces and 4 commando battalions. This past nine months, we've been taking the initial steps toward some of the enablers, and I'll be happy to talk about those.

On the ministerial capacity, ministries of defense and interior have 10 major functions. They have a force management function, acquisition, training, distribution, deployment, sustainment, development, separation, a resourcing function and a leadership function. And all this has to be done in a transparent way.

This is a long-term project and this will take some time. But you can't have self-sustaining security forces without good force generation and force replenishment processes. And you can't have force generation and force replenishment without ministers that can go through those 10 functions. So again I'll be happy to take your questions on those.

Lastly we do have a series of continuing issues that we're dealing with. There is, as I said, huge progress in many areas, quality and quantity. But we're not free of difficulties.

We still have to finish the growth of the counterinsurgency force. We're going to focus in 2008 on developing a self-sustaining enabler without any loss of momentum in the aviation -- excuse me -- aviation field. The national police professionalization will continue through 2008 and 2009. The Iraqi police have to integrate the Sons of Iraq or concerned local citizens, as they were called, and the minister of Interior and government of Iraq are making plans to do that.

And we have difficulty overall with leaders. While we're at 70 -- 73 percent officers, 69 percent NCOs, we still want to grow beyond that, and police officers are also something that we're lagging behind. We grew the police force, as I said, by 40,000 last year, and we're lagging behind in police officers. We're working on a plan to do that, and I'll be happy to answer your questions about that.

And that's about it for summary. I hope I whet your appetite to some degree, and I'll be ready to answer whatever questions you have.

MR. WHITMAN: Well, it looks like you did. We do have a few questions. Let's start with Pauline and then we'll go to Kristin. How's that?

Q Sir, it's Pauline Jelinek of the Associated Press. This increase in officers that you talked about -- can you give us any specific numbers and tell us what you're aiming for, and also a little bit about the challenges in developing that corps?

GEN. DUBIK: Sure. The officer corps in the Iraqi army went up by 700 in the last half of 2007 and is still growing. There's several hundred more names with the minister of Defense. These are officers mostly from the former army that are rejoined, as they call it here, vetted then through the intelligence services and then brought -- if the vetting process is successful, brought on to active duty and assigned to positions commensurate with their rank and their specialties. So 700 officers in the last half of the year brought the aggregate strength up to 70 percent. In the NCOs, it was almost 1,200 -- 1,100-something. And again, those are a combination of rejoiners, which are a good number.

I don't have the specific number off the top of my head, but good number.

And the bulk, though, are new corporals, because what the Iraqi army had decided to do was take the top 10 percent of the graduates from their basic training, send them to a corporal's course immediately for a couple of weeks, for advanced training in weapons, advanced training in mechanics and maintenance, and advanced training in leadership, and send them to their units as corporals. This has had a very positive effect at the lower end, which of course in a counterinsurgency is the end that fights. And the thinking is that this cadre of corporals will ultimately grow over time to become squad leaders, platoon sergeants, first sergeants, sergeant majors. So those are the two biggest rank -- biggest changes in the Iraqi army.

Some of the challenges are vetting. We do want the process to be a little bit quicker, but the vetting process is a necessary one to have the confidence that we've got -- we got rejoiners that will be loyal to the government. And with respect to the NCOs, it's going to be a long-term project. Very happy to be at a 69 percent level; we were down below 40 (percent) earlier, 2007. But it'll be a slow process to grow into senior NCOs.

Q Just so I'm clear, when you say 69 percent, you mean of total target numbers, or 69 percent of where you would hope to be by now, or --

GEN. DUBIK: Yeah, no, I'm sorry. There's a -- each unit has a number of officers that are supposed to be assigned to it -- one officer per platoon, one captain per company, one battalion commander, et cetera. And when you aggregate all that, you get a hundred percent of your authorized -- a hundred percent of authorized officer positions. And what I'm saying is that 70 percent in the aggregate, we have that many officers. We have 30 percent more to grow. And that's a good thing, to have a lot of officers. But as I said, we have a distribution problem in that many are at the lieutenant through captain rank and many are senior colonel and generals.

But we still have a problem in the middle, majors, lieutenant colonels and junior colonels. Sergeants are the same way. We have 69 percent of all of those who are authorized, but most are the junior ranks, not enough in the senior ranks, and that'll take a while to even out.

Q Sir, it's Kristin Roberts with Reuters. I'm hoping you can speak in a little bit more detail about the logistics and maintenance problems. I know that the focus has been

for a long time on developing the combat forces or the maneuver forces. But has there been any progress in the Iraqis' ability to do their own logistics and maintenance, and what is the timeline, the time frame, for getting them up to speed?

GEN. DUBIK: Sure. Thanks Christine (sic/Kristin). Yeah, logistics, actually, is making some good progress. It will be until the end of this year until we're in a different logistics position, but you can already see here some of the changes. For example, in December the minister of defense had declared that his forces would go to self-sufficiency in life support -- food, primarily, and fuel. He's doing a very good job across the board in terms of feeding themselves, had a little bit of rocky start in December and January, but now that's pretty much smoothed out, and now he's working on the fueling issue. That will take a couple of months to get that ironed out, but that part of logistics is on track, and they're progressing.

They have built eight of their logistics bases, eight of 13, so we have five more bases to build. That's one per division, and each logistics base has its own ammunition supply point, its own fuel point, its own maintenance facility, its own radio repair facility and its own dining facility and its own motor park. So eight of the 13 are constructed, and five are completely manned. And we're still working on the rest of them. Nine of the 12 motor transport regiments are fielded, and this is very important because each division has a motor transport regiment, except for the mechanized division; it has a different organization. But the 12 infantry divisions have motor transport regiments, and these are large trucks, five-ton trucks, that allow the division commander to move supplies from his logistics base out to his brigades and battalions and then back and forth across his battlespace. So nine motor transport regiments fielded, and we still have three more to go.

These are big changes in the logistics enabler over the last nine months. Taji National Depot complex, again, it's been a long-term project.

This is a complex that has a wheeled vehicle facility repair, or repair facility, a track vehicle repair facility, small arms repair facility, generator repair, radio repair, a large set of warehouses. That's in Central Iraq.

This complex starts coming online in mid-April, and it will take a year before all of the parts of the complex are online. But that has begun, and this is going to be a big ship.

Right now all the supplies coming in to the Iraqi military goes to Taji National Depot Complex. It's accounted for; it's stored. And that's the place from which they distribute.

The mechanic training program is also something that we've progressed at least a little bit on. They need 3,000 mechanics. They have a little bit over 1,000 now. And we think, through the period of 2008, we'll get to at least 2,000, maybe a little bit more.

And the good news there, from my standpoint, is that the Iraqi joint headquarters is tracking mechanics, radio repairmen, cooks and drivers in their databases, so that when they graduate from the courses and go to the units, they're used in those specialties. This is a big boost to the combat service support and the logistics areas.

So again there are some things going very well, as I described. And we've still got work to do through 2008.

Q It's Jonathan Karl with ABC News.

I wanted to ask you about the Sons of Iraq or concerned local citizens. How many of the current force, 80,000 or so, you have, that there are now, how many of those do you see getting integrated into the Iraqi police or Iraqi army? When do you see that happening? And what are the biggest obstacles to making that happen?

GEN. DUBIK: Well, it's happening now. It actually has been happening since late summer, early fall, even before we called it an official Sons of Iraq or concerned local citizens program.

In Al Anbar, we hired about 10,000 new police in the late summer, early fall period. Many were in the category that now we would call Sons of Iraq. In Baghdad, we've hired almost 12,000 over the past five months; again many in the category of Sons of Iraq.

Diyala: We're going to hire several thousand there as well. And once things settle down in Ninawa, well, we've already begun the recruiting process there.

So we've already been doing this; we meaning the government of Iraq. It started off in a rough way, because there was no process to vet these Iraqi citizens. And so the government, I think, wisely said, we do want to bring them into the security forces but we want to vet them properly to make sure that we have people again who are loyal to the government.

So they set up a reconciliation committee -- the government of Iraq -- at the prime minister level, set up a process so that the Sons of Iraq are first vetted at the local level, coalition forces and provincial director of police, sent to the regional operations center and -- their names, not the bodies -- then to the prime minister's office for the reconciliation committee, and then over to the minister of Interior for hiring. That process has taken a couple of months to shake out, but they have shaken it out, and they are hiring at a pretty good clip right now. So the process is shaking out.

Now, how many? We're estimating somewhere around 20, 25 percent of the people who are in the Sons of Iraq program will want to come into the security forces, will be in good enough health and physically capable to join, and in a location where they want to join. And we base that on polls that say somewhere around 19,000 of those now on contract do want to join the security force. So that's where we are in terms of numbers.

Of course, the larger number are people that want jobs in the local area. And the government of Iraq, through several ministries and with the Multinational Force Iraq, are now working on several programs on how to move -- once security is good enough that they can stop providing security, because they have been a very beneficial aspect of providing security -- once security's good enough that we don't need them anymore in that capacity, how do they transition into educational programs or vocational programs or other job programs? And that's the thinking and the coordination that's going on now and in some places actually is occurring.

MR. WHITMAN: Joe, go ahead.

Q Sir, this is Joe Tabet with Al Hurra. Talking about the increase in numbers in the police and the army, what's the current size in terms of number of the Iraqi police and the Iraqi army? And what are your goals that you are looking to reach, you and the Iraqi government?

GEN. DUBIK: The Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior have set for themselves somewhere around 600,000 aggregate military and police as the force that would be large enough to maintain security in the country. And so that's where they're aiming, and they think that they should get to that point sometime around 2010. Right now, or as of the end of the year, the total number of people was about 531,000 -- 180,000--some in the military, 200,000) and -- or, correction, 340,000--some in the police forces, and about 3,000 in the special operations forces. And they are on a growth path where they can sustain this size of force, both with money and with equipment.

You will know that in 2006, the government of Iraq has began paying more for their security forces than the Iraqi Security Force Fund contains. That trend continued in 2007 and again in 2008. So they're very cognizant of the size of force they believe they need, and they're very cognizant of the fact that they've got to spend -- put money in their budget to maintain this size of force.

MR. WHITMAN: Jeff, go ahead.

Q General, Jeff Schogol, Stars and Stripes. Can you talk about some of the enablers you are going to be working on in 2008?

GEN. DUBIK: Sure. Thanks, Joe (sic). I'll go over -- first, again, the enablers for the military are a combination of these items: It's intelligence; then it's maneuver forces; then it's fire forces, aviation forces, sustainment logistics, engineer -- mobility, counter-mobility; and command and control. It's a combination of those seven things that make combat power. And here, to date we have been focused primarily, though not exclusively, on the maneuver forces. We have built the divisions, the brigades, the battalions, the special operations forces, the police forces, and that's been, in my opinion, the right focus.

On the intelligence areas, we have already built 10 of the division reconnaissance units -- company-sized reconnaissance units. We've put in -- we, meaning the government of Iraq and the coalition forces -- have put in the -- a nationwide network into which these intelligence units at division level and province level for the minister of the Interior can connect. We've established the connectivity between and among the intelligence forces.

And we're down now with respect to the minister of Interior to have intelligence offices in each of the provinces. And then we'll keep expanding that network throughout the year and next year.

In command and control, 12 of the 13 divisions are formed, with their signal companies, which is important because that's how they command and control. Each of the divisions goes through a training exercise before the division headquarters is fielded. The numbers of officers and NCOs, as I said, is up, and we've begun staff training at battalion and brigade level. So at the command and control level, Army, those are the things that have progressed in that enabler, and the air force is beginning to put in the Iraqi airspace management system, an air operations center system. And this is also an important part of the command and control.

And the last command and control, we have five of the area operation centers in. There should be eight total. And those five are connected to two national nodes -- a joint operation center and national operation center. So the command and control enabler is starting also to grow.

On the aviation side, very important, this year we doubled the number -- almost doubled the number of pilots that we had last year. We went from flying less than 30 missions per week -- Iraqi air force missions in support of Iraqi army -- to now over 300 per week, so this is a thousand-percent increase in Iraqis' air force support to their army. They fly Huey II helicopters, Mi-17 helicopters. They have a fixed-wing surveillance and reconnaissance platform. They've got three C-130s. They've got Bell Jet Rangers and Cessnas for training aircraft. Over the next year we'll double the size of the aircraft -- or double the number of aircraft -- I'm sorry -- and we will almost double again the number of pilots and crews. So I'm expecting the aviation enabler to grow also in 2008.

And then the combat service support enabler I talked about before.

We are not focusing on the fire enablers just yet. That will be coming later in 2008. And on the engineer side, that's not one of our focuses, but we have begun by building a(n) explosive and ordnance demolition school. We have fielded several engineer battalions -- I think, four. We've got nine engineer companies, we've got 10 bomb disposal units. They're introducing robotics into their program. So while it's not a focus area, that doesn't mean we're not doing anything.

So that's the status of enablers. Again, a story that -- there's a lot of progress in it and still there's some work to do.

Q Follow up briefly. Can you say when the Iraqis are expected to take control of their own air space?

GEN. DUBIK: I don't have a projection on that, and they are not ready now. The beginning of their air operations center and the beginning of their air space management system, in terms of the military side, is just now getting off the ground. So I don't expect that to be done in any time in the next few months.

MR. WHITMAN: Well, General, we have reached the end of our time, and we know it's been a long day for you and we want to be respectful of your time. But before I bring it to a close, why don't I throw it back to you in case there's something that we haven't asked you that you would like to close with.

GEN. DUBIK: Well, you've asked me everything that I would have expected you to. I would like to reiterate that the Iraqi security forces have taken advantage of this period in which security has increased and political progress has been made. They have made significant progress in size, quantity and in quality, and some of the things that were on the table, in terms of difficulties, are now off the table. Of course all progress is marked by posing new sets of problems, and we do have new sets of problems, but they're new. And as the person in charge of helping them develop their security forces, as long as we're moving onto new problems, I'm satisfied.

I would like to take a break, if I could, Bryan. My wife is probably watching this live. She's at Fort Belvoir. This is the anniversary of us getting engaged, so I just want to acknowledge that I did remember that, it was in Hawaii, and we had a great time and I look forward to coming home.

MR. WHITMAN: Well, we're -- congratulations, and we're glad that we could give you the opportunity on this day to send that message, too.

Thank you again for your time. We hope to do this with you again in the near future and get another update.

GEN. DUBIK: Me, too.