

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL CHRISTOPHER FULTON, U.S. ARMY, DIRECTORATE OF INTERIOR AFFAIRS, MULTINATIONAL SECURITY TRANSITION COMMAND-IRAQ VIA TELECONFERENCE TIME: 10:00 A.M. EDT DATE: THURSDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2008

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CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Colonel Fulton, welcome to the Bloggers Roundtable today. And do you have an opening statement for us?

COL. FULTON: I've got a few things I sure wouldn't mind talking about, to kind of set the flavor of what I do here and maybe lead us down the road to some discussion points coming from your side.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

COL. FULTON: I know you've got bios. But just to introduce myself, colonel, United States Army; originally come out of Minnesota; graduated from the academy in '81. Field artillery has been my branch for the last 27-plus years. I come from a job out of United States Strategic Command, a joint job there, chief of staff for a three-star Air Force General. And I deployed over here and have been on the ground now for about five months.

So I'm finally at the point here, in this environment, where I'm comfortable with what we do, for the most part, not to say that there's not something that comes up every day that I don't have a clue how to deal with it. But overall it's an enjoyable experience to come over here and deploy and be a part of what's going on over here.

A little bit about our organization, just so you understand what I do, I'm the chief of staff for the Directorate of Interior Affairs. And I don't know how familiar the bloggers out there are with TRADOC, Training and Doctrine Command, in the United States Army. But we're not that different from TRADOC in that our responsibility is with the ministry of interior. And we are responsible for assisting them in manning, equipping and training their police forces.

And then the other primary thing we do is we advise the ministry -- all the different deputy minister levels -- we can go into those details if you want to -- on, you know, how do -- how do you manage the forces that you've now built, because they've grown incredibly over the last four years, almost to the tune of 400 percent. So you can imagine a very large corporation grows by 400 percent, you got to have the administration and all the pieces that facilitate that. And so we help them with that.

I'm going to read our mission statement real quick. It may lead some people to think of some questions that they might have. But our mission statement is that we assist the Ministry of Interior to complete generation of professional, credible police forces while developing institutional capacity to acquire, train, develop, manage, sustain and resource those forces, leading to self reliance and maintenance of -- (inaudible).

So pulled lots of main bullets of that that probably -- might generate some questions. First one is complete generation: That means that generation of forces has to do with the manning aspect of it and also the equipping aspect of it, predominately. So yeah, we've grown to a force of over 420,000 of Ministry of Interior police -- police security forces in a whole bunch of different flavors. We also have equipped them significantly -- we can go into some of those details. Imagine, you know, what's important to a policeman: his rifle, his pistol, his patrol vehicle, his body armor, uniforms, those kind of thing.

The second bullet I've got here is develop professional police forces. That really has to do with their training but also their education. So we have advisors at the Baghdad police college. That's where they produce officers. And we have advisors at every one of their 17 training centers that are spread out across Iraq as well, dealing directly with the police training mission.

On the develop institutional capacity, these are our members who go up into the Ministry of Interior every day and actually go face to face in their advising role with the Ministry of Interior leaders, and that runs the gamut from budget and finance to strategic planning to administration, logistics, you name it. We have approximately 60 people a day go up into the Ministry of Interior to do face-to-face coordination and advising with them. And got some great relationships established with our Iraqi counterparts. And then self-reliance, that's -- you know, obviously, what we're working towards, our goal, is to make them self-reliant, you know, the security forces, so we can come home. And it's a daily effort on our part and they're actually getting a lot better in this regard. So we can talk about that as well if you want.

One of our primary efforts dealing with the Ministry of Interior has to do with the rule of law. Okay, the rule of law runs everything from a new penal code that they have established, which is very similar to our own uniform code of military justice to human rights inspections, which we accompany them on, just helping them really get their judicial system going. It's really a team effort with a number of different agencies, but we're a part of that.

And then my final point I'd like to make in our mission statement is our attempt to move towards what we call police primacy. Right now, you can imagine, in Iraq, at least for the last few years with the counterinsurgency battle going on, that the police have not taken center stage. The army has taken center stage, rightfully so. Now we got to look beyond that as we gain stability and security through the police rolling back into a primacy role, particularly in the urban areas.

So that's kind of one of the other efforts.

I've got some organizational points that I could bring up, but let me just kind of shape some possible discussion questions about the Joint Campaign Plan and the four areas that we, DOIA, engage in, support in, to support the Joint Campaign Plan.

The first one is force generation. I talked about that. That's a major effort on our part.

The second one -- the second area that we support in the Joint Campaign Plan is the Iraqi ability to operate independently and conduct their business with minimum coalition assistance. We have a lot of effort in that.

The third area that we look at is their improvement in institutional performance that have to do with capacity-building and also how they rate themselves as they go about their business, develop their own processes and (especially ?) while executing their strategic plan.

And then a last area that we focused on as part of the Joint Campaign Plan is professionalism and sectarian behavior and how that all plays out inside the Ministry of Interior.

So (kind of as ?) a wrap-up to my opening comments, if you ask the question, how are they doing, not only are they growing in numbers, but they're growing in confidence and capability was what I would say right up front. And the fact that you probably see less news about them now is a good thing. But they really are; they really are becoming much more confident. Capabilities are -- even in the five months I've been here, have been notably increased. And so that's all goodness.

So the second thing in how they're doing is, we are fully engaged in helping them develop their logistics capabilities. That is a problem area for them. They have a different system than we do for sure, and so we're working with them, using their system, to try to maximize it, so they can get better logistics out there to the forces -- still an area that's got a lot of work that we need to engage with them.

And then the final point on how they're doing is -- I would just say that their capacity to manage a large force from a ministerial perspective is moving ahead quickly. So with that, I'll open it up for whoever's got the first question.

MR. HOLT: All right. Thank you very much. Had a couple of folks join us here. Who's -- who joined us? Jarred, are you there?

Q Yes, sir.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Q And Claire Russo.

MR. HOLT: And Claire. Okay.

Well, Jarred, why don't you get us started?

Q Great. Thank you, sir. Appreciate the information.

Could you talk a little bit about the -- one of the big problems has been the central government services with the nahiyas and the qadhas, the local level, particularly, obviously with the sectarian groupings. Talk a little bit about what you see on the ground as far as the interrelationships between the central government and the local government.

COL. FULTON: See if I can -- from my perspective, the only way that I can personally relate to it is the relationship between, at the police level, the provincial director of police and the deputy minister for police affairs, which is up in the Ministry of Interior.

The PDOP -- that's the short for provincial director of police -- has got responsibility inside the province for all things that have to do with the police force. So that includes the budget. That includes hiring activities. That includes equipping.

So the relationship, and this may not be going down the direction that you're interested in at all. But you know, the ministry of interior works everything through the PDOP to execute the police mission inside the province.

If you could go back and any details on -- specifically you started going down a sectarian road. I don't know if I'll be able to help you on that. But could you, could you ask that part again?

Q Well, basically I mean, you know, no one works in their own little universe.

I mean, the districts have to work with the central government to a certain extent, as far as training, as far as equipment goes, you know, as far as being able to recruit different people into the forces. And obviously we know one of the big problems is the sectarian divide between the, you know, between Anbar Sunnis versus the Shi'a-led Baghdad government.

So can you talk a little bit about the progress being made that you see on the ground?

COL. FULTON: I can, I can honestly tell you that from the dealings that at least I see, between the ministry of interior and these PDOPs that are out there, I don't perceive any sectarian favoritism. And you know, it's too public, I think, for any kind of sectarian activities, not that there would be anyway.

But yeah, clearly Anbar province, they've got a PDOP out there that is quite a character. But he doesn't get treated, as far as I can tell, any differently than the PDOP here in Baghdad.

So I don't, I don't perceive the problem that, you know, maybe comes out or used to. Maybe it used to be a large problem. I don't know. But in the five months I've been here, I have not seen that as an issue.

MR. HOLT: All right. And that also speaks to the growing professionalism, I would believe, wouldn't it, sir? COL. FULTON: Yes, absolutely. I'm trying to think if there's any other discussion points I could add, to that particular point. And believe me, we do track this. We track it from a manning perspective. We track it from an equipping perspective.

You know, who's got the priority for equipping? Who's making a judgment on priority? Are they following their priorities? And all indicators point to that not being a problem.

MR. HOLT: All right. Okay, sir. And Claire?

Q Sir, I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about the emergency response units and if those are MOI run? I mean, I guess I've seen them referred to as various different names -- emergency police forces. If you could -- if you can, talk about how they're vetted, how much training they get and how they're deployed.

COL. FULTON: Yes. And you're right, it's very confusing. There are a whole bunch of different names out there and it drives us crazy, as we're trying to track these so we can best support them. And ESUs, ERUs, the new term is ERBs, they use the battalion term, which is just confusing everybody -- but right, emergency response units are provincial-level units that are controlled by the provincial directorate of police.

And let me back up and give you just a little bit of history that I know of. There used to be one ERU and in the summer -- and this is the emergency response unit. It was a national unit. And it actually changed to a(n) emergency response brigade just this past summer. And this is a direct report-to-the-minister organization, kind of high-level -- high-risk warrants, those kind of things. And they actually are about brigade size and predominately operate here out of Baghdad.

Every province, then, either -- used to call them different things or whatever, but we now use the term ERUs. But every province has -- not every one, but the majority of provinces have these types of units and they kind of by purpose execute the same missions that -- as the ERB -- high-risk warrants, kind of -- kind of paramilitary type of operations in support of the provincial director of police and the provincial governor.

Their training -- they get pulled out of the actual Iraqi police force and indications that we have is that they tend to draw from the -- kind of their more strong performers inside the police force. But that's how they form them. They take police that they've already got inside the province. They form the ERUs. And then I can even tell you that across all the provinces, their mission sets are probably not -- probably not exactly the same.

Some of them in some cases are predominantly personnel support -- I mean security detachments for the PDOP in some cases, other cases they truly do execute more of a high warrant arrest kind of mission. But they're out there. Some provinces actually have multiple ERUs.

And from our perspective, the challenge is -- is to try to get a handle on the proliferation of these type of organizations, because left to their own devices, they will grow. And that's kind of what we've seen. Every PDOP wants their own, and once they find out that their neighbor PDOP has one, then they want two.

In fact, just this last week we had a session with the Ministry of Interior, Minister Bolani, and we actually brought in a lot of the special unit leaders to discuss this very issue. How do you get under control the situation where they've got multiple units that when you look at it from the outside, it makes it seem like they're kind of doing the same thing?

And so -- resources are limited, and so what we're trying to do is advise them to take kind of a more, oh, mission-essential task list approach to what do you really want the ERUs to do; is that in conflict with what the ERB does, the national police, the swat teams that every province also has?

So it's an interesting situation. But for the most part, their training is good at the basic police level, and then the coalition forces in some cases have actually married up with them for some additional training for some of the specialty type of training that they get.

Does that answer your question?

Q Yes, sir, it does. If I could ask a sort of follow-on question to that. You know, I'm -- obviously, answer whatever you can here. But the raid that happened in Diyala a while back, there was all different claims -- on the provincial center, where it killed one of the governor's aides and arrested the head of provincial security.

There was discussion that it was an ERU and that it came -- but it was an ERU out of the Ministry of the Interior. I guess if you can't talk specifically to how something like that happens or particularly that incident and who did it, I wonder if you could talk about the sort of conflict -- I guess you hinted at it a little bit -- but the conflict between these units -- if there is any conflict between these units being deployed by -- at the provincial level and running into issues with the Iraqi army or Ministry of the Interior-run forces.

COL. FULTON: Yeah. I can't really give any details on the raid. I can't even confirm that it was ERUs that were involved in it, because of the challenges with different types of units that are out in the battlespace.

The challenge that we have -- this is one of the points we've made with the Ministry of Interior at the session last week -- you know, the challenge is deconfliction of battle space when you've got all these different units out there and they're not centrally controlled.

MR. HOLT: Right.

COL. FULTON: So you've got -- you may have the ERB, which is more centrally controlled, executing a mission, but you know, who's deconflicting that with the PDOP may be executing a similar mission. So it's a challenge. It's a problem that they are going to have to come to grips with.

I will tell you that they are making very positive progress in their command and control arena from the provincial joint command centers, which feed up to the National Command Center and the Ministry of Interior, and then probably less so, but eventually much more important, into the National Operations Center.

And so they're working hard on that because they understand that it is going to be a problem, the deconflicting battlespace, particularly when you -- when they kind of focus their efforts in a province, like they did in Diyala.

So yeah, it's an interesting problem. I can't give you any more details, though, on the specific incident.

Q Okay. Thank you, sir. MR. HOLT: Okay. And Jarred?

Q Yes, sir. Can you talk a little bit more about the Sons of Iraq or the Sawa, and there are reports that the -- you know, that the Iraqi central government took over the payment schedule for them, but there are some other reports that some of them aren't happy or -- what's really the situation on the

ground that you're seeing as far as bringing those militia elements into the formal police structure?

COL. FULTON: Well, I will tell you that it is happening. The good news is the government of Iraq has taken over the program, and all indications to us are is that they are sincere in wanting to do the right thing with the Sons of Iraq. Time will tell as far as, you know, the real future of it. But right now it all seems to be moving in a positive direction.

I can't give you any specific numbers right now that, you know, are already present inside the Ministry of Interior forces and the Iraqi army, but there are Sons of Iraq serving and they -- you know, we certainly take it very seriously from the United States government perspective, and the good news is, is that it now appears that the Iraqis are taking it serious as well.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Any follow-ups?

Q Well, I have another question.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Q I'm not -- again, I'm not sure how much of this -- how much of this is in your -- is in your frame of reference, sir, but I am wondering about -- we've seen a fair amount of targeting of Ministry of the Interior buildings and Ministry of the Interior officials. And I just wonder if you can talk to that at all, if there's anything you could tell me about who we -- who you think's doing that or why it's happening now.

COL. FULTON: It is happening, I can tell you that. There are attacks -- not every day, but you know, they're regular enough to get everybody's attention, to include the Ministry of Interior. And there's actually some focused effort within the ministry to get at the heart of the problem.

I can't tell you specifically what groups are doing it, but you can -- you can guess as well as I can the ones that would have an interest in taking out a government official in the country.

Q Yes, sir.

COL. FULTON: I will tell you that there's -- there's a lot of activity, though, that is going on to get at the heart of the problem. And that -- and that is not from the coalition side. That's from the Ministry of Interior side. They're very concerned about it, as you can imagine.

It -- you know, some people say, oh, it's increasing. I don't know that it's necessarily increasing. You know, they always get our attention every time it happens because we work with these people every day. So just -- it is -- I just got to, I guess, just say that there's getting a lot of focus on it right now and hopefully they can kind of get it under control. Yeah, and also, it does appear that it's possibly a little bit of changing tactics, you know, al Qaeda coming in and doing -- some tactics aren't working so we're going to change and -- change our tactics a little bit.

You know, we have an election coming up and, you know, weird things start happening in our country during elections, too, so I don't know -- I don't know if that's to having to do with this. But there's a lot of people working on this particular issue.

Q Thank you, sir.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir.

Okay, anything else, anyone else.

Q I've got another question then.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Q What about the fact of, if we're trying to plan for the long term, 5, 10, 15-year future down the road, is there any more plan to try to get the national police, not the local police but the national forces, more assimilated, where you take people from one part of the country and put them into units with other parts of the country, as far as mixing different Kurds, the peshmerga or whatever, in with Sunni and Shi'a and Turkmen, so that you would have a national police force instead of constant localized sectarian forces?

COL. FULTON: Actually the national police is an interesting example for you to use. Because of all the forces, they're the ones probably trying to make the biggest effort.

You know, if you think about a policeman back home, in your hometown, you know, I come from Grand Rapids, Minnesota, 8,000 people. Every one of the policemen is from Grand Rapids, Minnesota.

So to have an expectation that across the entire country, we're going to have policemen who are, who are mixed is probably not a realistic expectation except in the national police, because it's a national organization that is deployable anywhere in the country. And we've got some --

You know, I wasn't here a couple years ago. But I understand that the national police had some significant issues. Well, I think we're beyond that. All of our indications are, they are very professional, very progressive and looking forward to the next 5, 10, 15 years.

They do have a long-term plan. And part of that is making sure they have an ethnic mix as they, as they shape themselves now into -- their third division is being shaped right now. But there are future plans of at least a fourth division within the next year. Does that answer anything?

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Jarred, anything else.

Q Well, that's great. And then how do they determine the deployments of those? I mean, is that set at the national level, to put a brigade, you know, in a certain district? I mean, or do they rotate troops to the national police forces through different cities? Or who determines those schedules?

COL. FULTON: Well, are you talking about basing or actual operational deployments?

Q Operational deployments.

COL. FULTON: Yeah.

Their operational deployments are really determined at the highest levels of the Iraqi government.

And you've been following all of the -- you know, starting last year with Basra and in the other operations that have gone on. Those are all nationally directed, especially the national police. They go under the command and control of the prime minister or the minister of Interior, but only at that level. There's no independent operations with the national police. They are executing the country's operational plans.

MR. HOLT: All right.

Q Okay. I would have one follow-up, then, just on logistically, you know, throughout the last few years -- we hear about the problems. I hear that that's gotten much better. You know, we've seen -- I guess they're trying to buy up the older United States humvees. How is the equipping of the force and the supplying, the life maintenance cycle of the different police units, how is that moving forward?

COL. FULTON: Let me focus first of all on -- well, in general, I would tell you that that's probably their weakest area, is sustainment and logistics, maintenance, the kind of things that we have a -- you know, we in the United States, especially in our military, have a very, very solid -- I mean, the depth of our sustainment is pretty incredible. Well, they don't have that depth.

If you look at it from the national level for the national police, who are a deployable force -- right now they're in the process of standing up a -- what they're calling the National Police Sustainment Brigade, and they actually will have a sustainment brigade which is not that different, really, in focus and mission from the way a military unit would -- a deployable military unit would sustain themselves.

They do have humvees. We are issuing humvees -- actually, we had a training class show up from the national police this week up to -- (inaudible) -- to go through training and then be executed (sic), for each brigade inside the national police, 125 up-armored humvees. And that's -- that program is going exceptionally well. We're up to a cross between the army units and the national police -- I want to say almost 2,000 humvees have been issued out. And eventually, in the end analysis, the national police and the, actually, Minister of Interior forces will have over 1,700 up-armored humvees that will be issued to them over the course of the next 18 months or so. Now if you think about local police, though, and you think about -- again, go back home to your hometown, and where do the local police get sustainment done? Well, they do it by setting up contracts with local garages. So it's no different here.

I would tell you, though, at a -- at the ministerial level, they are focused on establishing some sort of ministerial-level sustainment program. There will be a maintenance center, which is going to be built up in the center part of the country, that will support across the entire country minister of Interior forces. And that's -- you know, that's -- and that's the national sustainment center for the Ministry of Interior. That will also include a warehouse complex for the distribution of all equipment.

We have, through the use of Iraqi security force funds -- (audio break) -- you know, have really provided incredible amount of equipment to get them up on their feet, get them generated, get them operated, and they're at the point now where they're executing, (through ?) foreign military sales and direct contract, their own efforts to continue in that first generation of equipment.

There are some challenges with it. If you have four trucks, and you don't have a neighboring Ford dealership, it's a challenge get parts, it's a challenge to get things fixed.

They are very good at -- (inaudible) -- mechanics -- (audio break) -- of things, so they keep them running. But -- and there's lots of effort right now to get spare parts in, so that they can continue to keep the fleet running that we've got.

It is a -- it's still an immature area. Just got to be honest with you. And it's the same at -- but they're working real hard, and we're working real hard with them to be able to move them forward.

(Does that help ?)?

MR. HOLT: All right. Yes, sir. I know we're running a little short of time here. But sir, do you have any closing thoughts for us?

COL. FULTON: Well, I would just -- I would go back to just sort of repeat what I said, I think, right up front, talking about the confidence and the capabilities of the Iraqi police forces. I think the -- you know, obviously the Iraqi army gets quite a bit of press. It's just kind of the nature of -- you have a military force over here, and (you know ?) -- and I'm a military guy, and working for the first time ever with -- around police forces, so it's a learning experience to me.

But I am regularly amazed at how quickly they are moving forward in their capabilities and also in their confidence to execute missions on their own.

I'm not out there every day with them, by a long shot. I have, generally speaking, an office job. But I certainly have a lot of people -- our people -- that are out there working with them every day.

And inside the ministry itself, you know, the Ministry of Interior, at one time, had kind of a shady reputation. That is -- that has long since passed. And Minister Bolani and his team are looking out as far as they reasonably can, given the conditions over here, to develop a strategic plan to move them forward.

But the only other point that I would say that is really getting a lot of emphasis and is worthy of at least mentioning is the ethics and human rights training that is going on inside of this country. And we do have personnel, advisors that work with the internal affairs, inside the Ministry of Interior. They also work with the inspector general. And when I say work, this is a daily -- daily sessions with these groups. We have people that escort them on human rights inspections.

And there's just a lot of very positive effort going on to establish what we all term the rule of law, because in the -- in the end analysis, we don't want -- nobody wants -- the army in the cities. You want police in the

cities. You want army conducting defense of the nation, not defense of the neighborhood. And so the good news is, is they're moving that direction and a lot of positive progress. So I'll close with that, unless anybody has any last questions.

MR. HOLT: All right, thank you, sir.

Jarred, anything else?

Q That's great. Thank you for your time, sir.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Claire?

Q No, sir. Thank you very much.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much. Colonel Christopher Fulton joining us. He's the chief of staff of the directorate of internal affairs for the Multinational Security Transition Command in Iraq. And thank you very much for joining us, sir. Q You bet. Glad to be here.

END.